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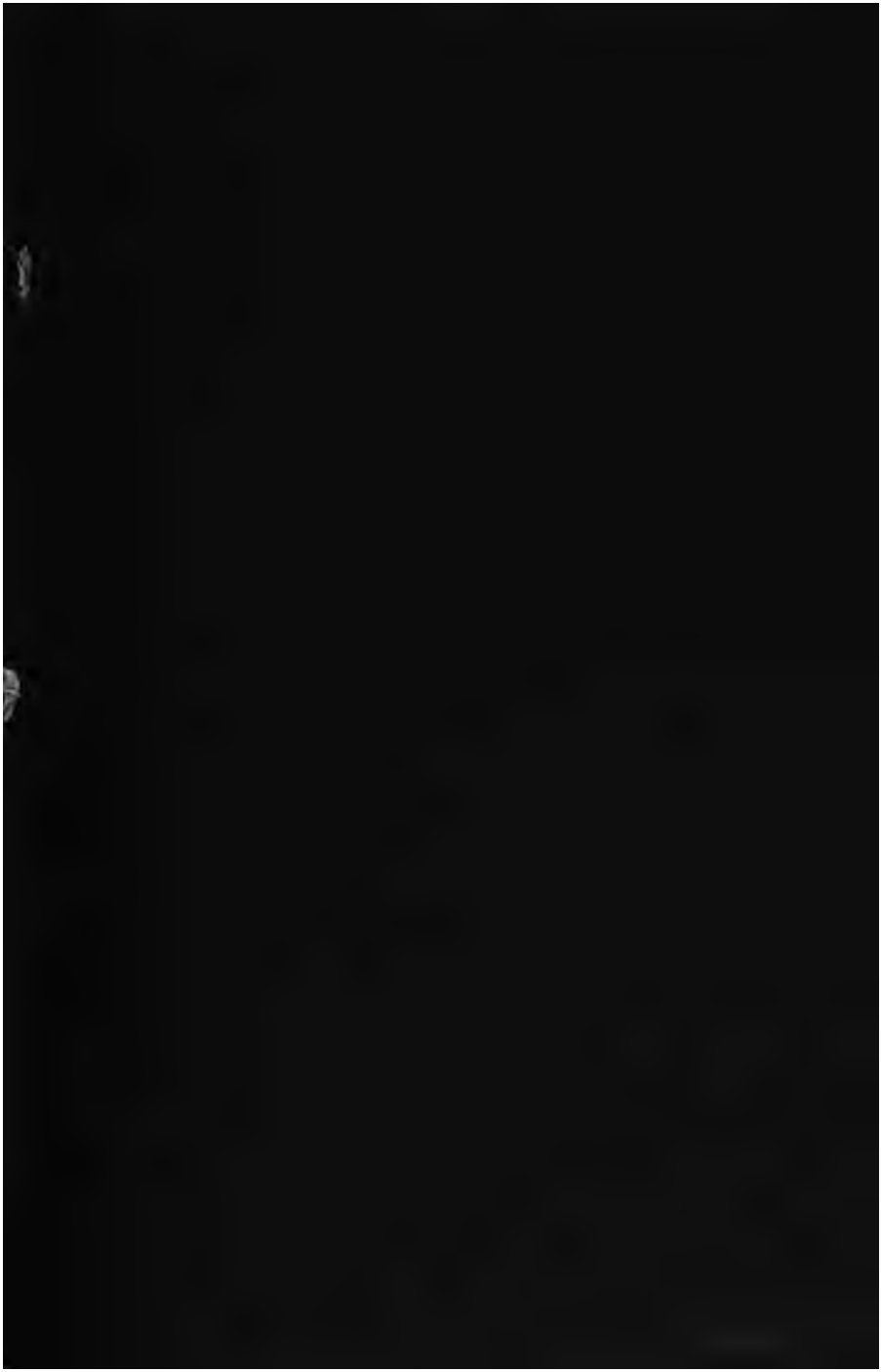

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

VOL. III.

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

BY

THE HON. MRS. ALFRED MONTGOMERY.

"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou! my guide and mine acquaintance."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

ENTANGLEMENTS.

THE whole of the day following that evening spent at the Wren's Nest Adelaide was in a state of mind which required no external objects to amuse or interest. It was enough to be lazily alive, and breathe the warm air. She lay dreaming the whole day, and when evening approached she took her guitar and sang. The house rang with the full rich melody of her velvet voice, and the native servants lingered in the corridors, and behind the open doors, as they went about their work, to catch the sounds.

Mr. Snowden was to be absent till the day

following. He had left home after his party. Adelaide had laid aside all anxiety about Sam's instalment in his new place. Indeed, she had well-nigh forgotten the circumstance; it had so dwindled in importance before the overflowing joy of her own restored security in Charles's affection, and the sort of unreasoning persuasion which possessed her that for the future all would go smoothly.

The whole of the day sped on calmly and tranquilly. She had no hankering for immediate intercourse again with Charles. She had enough to think of and dream about without hearing his voice for that one day, and he told her he was going to ride to a distant part of his plantations, and should be away from home all that day, and probably that night. Mrs. Oswald sent up a note to inform Adelaide that little George, the baby, was doing well, presuming that she might be anxious to hear.

"I promised your *inamorato*, my dear, that I would look after the poor little creature till he should return, which, judging from his intense

impatience to see you again, I imagine will not be later than to-morrow. Will you come down to Wren's Nest in the evening, if your father can spare you? Bring your guitar, for he wants to hear that song of 'Let my life be bright as the ocean's spray,' which he assures me you have never sung to him. I told him I believed the words to be your own, as well as the music. You will see by all this that we had a five-minutes' chat about you after you were borne away from us in your litter last night."

Adelaide crumpled up the note in her hand, and let it drop on the pavement by her side. She was not particularly troubled about the baby, whether he were ill or well. But she began to sing her song over again with fresh power and delight.

Night came on, and she retired to her room. Long Jack took his nightly prowl round the house to see that all was safe, and picked up the crumpled letter where Adelaide had let it fall. He smoothed it out in the palm of his hand and spelt its contents. *Inamorato* was an unknown

term to Jack; but he knew Mr. Falkener's baby's name was George, and he thought the rest quite plain enough for his purpose. So, folding it up carefully, he concealed it in his pocket, as a convenient weapon for future emergencies.

The next morning Adelaide resolved on spending a long day at the Wren's Nest. Her father's return was uncertain. Besides, she had none of the habits of a dutiful daughter, who would wait at home to receive her father. She would sing while Mrs. Oswald accompanied her, and in the evening Charles was sure to appear. She sent down to her friend to propose this, and the answer came entreating she would spend the night there, as there seemed no certainty about Mr. Snowden's movements. The proposition was accepted, and Adelaide, taking Nursie with her, set out for the Wren's Nest.

Early in the afternoon, just as the delicious sea-breeze which blows over the land and mitigates what would otherwise be the hottest time, was beginning to be felt, Mr. Snowden returned

to the Cedars. He was a little put out at finding no one at home to receive him. Not even Nursie, whose presence, as regarded his own personal comfort, was of more importance to him than his daughter's. But he liked to find Adelaide at home. It was pleasant to meet that lovely face as he entered the house; and if she were only in good-humour she had plenty to say, and said it well.

Finding himself entirely alone, Mr. Snowden was seized with a feverish activity, inducing him to set about something serious. Certain things wanted looking to. He had noticed discrepancies in the house, in the stables, in the dependencies; and this was a good opportunity, a little unlooked-for leisure in which to go well into them, and set his house in order. For this object Jack was called in to aid, and master and man set forth on their round of minute setting to rights—always the most irritating of occupations, even under the most propitious circumstances: and on a hot Jamaica afternoon, when you have been already rather put out,

quite fatal to the temper of anybody short of a tried saint.

The further they went and the more they investigated, the more obvious did it become that Sam had been summarily dismissed at a most awkward moment. He had had several jobs in hand of importance to the security and convenience of the household, and, what was of almost more importance, of the stables and dependencies. The locks had actually been taken off some of the doors for the purpose of being cleaned or mended. And Sam had been sent away before they had been put on again. Mr. Snowden was greatly annoyed, and kept appealing to Jack, first for sympathy in his annoyance, and finally for some counsel as to what could be done.

"What has become of that infernal rascal, Jack? Do you know where he is gone to?"

"Me supposes he could be found, if Massa wants him back again."

"What are you talking about? How could I have a fellow like that tampering with my

locks under pretence of mending them? I should want a body-guard to go round with him, and see he was up to none of his tricks. At the same time it is a terrible nuisance not having a carpenter and blacksmith at hand. I know of no one without sending twenty miles to fetch him."

"Sam not far off, if Massa like to have him for the job, and Mr. Falkener told Sam he could job about when he not want him."

"Mr. Falkener told Sam!—what the deuce has Mr. Falkener to do with where Sam goes and what he does?"

"Mr. Falkener took Sam straight away into his service as soon as Massa dismiss him. Miss Dinah very cock-a-hoop and pert about it, and no doubt Miss Dinah 'll be there too."

"Did Mr. Falkener know why I had parted with them both?"

"Oh! Massa, me not know—me never ask—no business of Jack's. Mr. Falkener asks no questions of Jack. Perhaps find it useful to have one of Missy's maids handy."

"If you go on with these hints and inuendoes, Jack, you will drive me mad. What does it all mean? Why can't you speak out?"

It was not in Jack's nature to be clear and succinct, and his round-about cloudy statements had the effect of lashing Mr. Snowden into a perfect fury. He thought it very ungentlemanly of Falkener to have received Sam at once into his own service without the slightest reference to himself. They were upon too intimate and familiar a footing for his doing so not to look like a grave slight, almost an insult, put upon a man of a higher standing in Jamaica than himself, and old enough to be his father.

It was not any business of Jack's to investigate Mr. Falkener's reasons, and it would very materially have interfered with his own little plans of private revenge had he been compelled to acknowledge that Mrs. Oswald had anything to do with Falkener's conduct in the matter. It would have robbed him at once of the delicious morsel of sweet revenge which he

was rolling under his tongue morally, and sucking with more gusto than the bear does his own paws. Jack would have found it very difficult, and perhaps dangerous, to hint to his master that his daughter and Falkener were upon more than friendly terms; but with the crumpled letter that had fallen from Adelaide's careless hand safe in his pocket, it was not necessary to use many words, for there was the proof.

Jack had no real reason for supposing that Dinah's services were called into requisition for carrying on what he represented as a regular intrigue; but then it was so plausible an assertion—it fell so entirely within the limits of probability that either she was, or might be, made use of—that he did not hesitate so to represent it to his master. Moreover, had not the two circumstances so aptly fitted in of Mr. Snowden's indignation about Sam's entering Falkener's service, and the fact that he was Adelaide's *inamorato*, it might have been possible to bring him round to view with approbation

the latter part. After all, Mr. Falkener was now far from being a bad match for a girl with Adelaide's prospects. In addition to the Jamaica estates, there was his father's property in England, and it was known that the elder man had just contracted a very good marriage. Snowden had been vaguely suspicious while Annie was alive, because he thought any nonsense of that kind would put real business out of Adelaide's head. But Falkener was free, and might in time have been acceptable, had it not been for the extreme indignation Mr. Snowden felt at what he looked upon as an ungentlemanly slight put upon himself, at the same time that Falkener was carrying on a clandestine intrigue with his only child.

Snowden was at all times a very touchy man, and in this instance he had an uncomfortable sense of being, in point of fact, very much Falkener's inferior. He knew that Falkener's manners and appearance entitled him to shine in a class of society where he would never be more than the rich, clever, but very vulgar

attorney. So long as he could assume the superiority of the older and (so far as Jamaica and actual possession were concerned) the wealthier man, he had been pleased rather to patronise Charles Falkener, and had often given him the advantage of his own greater experience as regarded the management of his property. But Charles, by his one act respecting Sam, had shown an independence of all consideration and deference which almost amounted to insult.

And Mr. Snowden's ire was in exact proportion to his wounded pride. Jack had calculated his diplomatic plot with the astuteness of a Macchiavelli. He might not have been able to put it into the best of language, but it needed only to fall back on the subtle instincts of his half savage nature, to arrive at a just appreciation of the circumstances of the case, which no amount of civilization could have improved.

At the same time, however, that he allowed himself to excite Mr. Snowden's passions to a

considerable extent, he very warily kept back certain circumstances. He knew the danger of plunging down the whole depth at once. It might lead him too far. It might be impossible to recede. And he had nearly a match for his own cunning in the character of his young mistress. Besides, had he said all he knew and hinted at all his coarse imagination wrongfully suggested, he knew he might create a reaction in the father's mind. Mr. Snowden might suspect Jack of exaggeration, and if he had been found out as untrue in any one statement the whole fabric might have fallen to the ground at once. Therefore Jack made no allusion to moonlight meetings beneath the catalpa tree. It would not be to his advantage to insinuate that Adelaide had ever actually transgressed propriety. It was quite enough for his purpose to make Mr. Snowden furiously angry with Falkener, and greatly displeased with any encouragement Adelaide might have given him. By saying no more than would lead to this he reserved a second string for his bow in the gra-

titude he might claim from Adelaide for not having openly aspersed her fair name. Therefore he simply drew from his breast-pocket Mrs. Oswald's letter to Adelaide of the evening before, and silently laid it before the father's indignant eyes. After that he shrouded himself in a silent delicate reserve, which testified a sort of intelligent sympathy with his master, without appearing to glance even in thought at other and far more terrible possibilities.

Snowden was a man of very violent temper and strong emotions. He stormed, he fumed, he raved. At length, when he had torn up and down the room at least half a hundred times, suggesting aloud to himself first this mode of vengeance and then that, resorting in imagination to horsewhips and cudgels as regarded Falkener, and suiting the action to the thought, he sank down on a chair before his writing-table, and prepared to execute a letter. There were several sheets blotted and bleared before he produced any epistle exactly to his taste. When finished, it ran as follows :—

"SIR,—I consider that you have acted in a very ungentlemanly and I may say blackguardly way, in taking my former carpenter Sam and his thievish daughter at once into your service, without the slightest reference to me and to the grounds of my dismissal of these servants from my establishment. Of course you can employ whom you please, and hire all the rogues in the country if it be any satisfaction to you. But there are certain things to be observed between gentlemen, and as you have failed in these you have forfeited your claim to being one. That being my opinion you will not be surprised if for the future I decline having any intercourse with you. And should I on any occasion have reason to suspect that you are forcing a continuance of your most objectionable attentions on my daughter, I shall visit your intrusion with a thorough good horsewhipping.

"J SNOWDEN."

Mr. Snowden considered this a very toned-

down letter. It had nothing of the thunder and blazes which irradiated the discarded sheets strown on the floor at his feet. A long period of Jamaica life had eliminated the cautious and wary attorney out of him, and had substituted the bluster and swagger of the moneyed man. But the above production was a sort of compromise between the two.

A servant was sent off post-haste with the letter; and then Mr. Snowden addressed himself to the still more difficult task of writing one to Adelaide at the Wren's Nest, to recall her immediately to her own home. He dared not expose himself to a regular scene with Adelaide; and he was partly ashamed to do so before Mrs. Oswald, or with her knowledge; while a lingering admiration for that lady made him indulgent towards her as regarded the part she seemed to have taken in the transaction.

The following was the result of all these mixed motives:—

"MY DEAR ADELAIDE,—I want you home im-

mediately, on a matter of importance, and of a very disagreeable nature. I consider myself as very badly used by Mr. Falkener in the question of Sam and Dinah. I do not know how far you and Mrs. Oswald are acquainted with the circumstances, but tell that lady, with my compliments, that I cannot allow you to meet Mr. Falkener at her house, where I am led to suppose he is a frequent visitor.

"Your affectionate father,

"J. SNOWDEN."

This note was to be given by no less trusty a messenger than Long Jack, who was ushered, at his particular request, into Mrs. Oswald's presence, that he might deliver it with his own hands. He accompanied the carriage that was to take back Adelaide; and he could not resist the satisfaction of watching for himself the countenance of his young mistress when she should read the letter. In this, however, he was disappointed. Adelaide did not lose her presence of mind. She read the note, and then

desired Long Jack to bring round the carriage in half an hour, and meanwhile to inform Nursie that she was going home. The door closed upon Long Jack, and then Mrs. Oswald, looking up from her drawing to Adelaide's pale stern face, ventured to ask,

"My dearest child, is anything the matter? Is your father ill? Why are you going so soon to leave me?"

Adelaide rose from her chair, and, silently laying the letter before her hostess, began pacing the room. When Mrs. Oswald had read the letter, Adelaide paused in front of her friend, and the two women looked for a moment silently into each other's faces.

"Do you suppose from this, Adelaide, that your father is very angry?"

"Considering the insult he puts upon you and me both, Georgiana, in ordering me out of your house at a moment's notice, he must be so angry as to have forgotten what is due to you as a lady, and entirely to ignore what he must

expect from *me* after thus summarily ordering me home."

"It is very provoking, Addy. I wonder how he first found it out? I think it will blow over, dear—I do indeed. Only I am so vexed for the pain to you; and I cannot bear thus losing your dear society, though I am persuaded it is only for a time."

"I do not think it will blow over, Georgie. Things don't blow over with my father. If you mean that my father's foolish touchiness will not ultimately prevent my being your guest whenever you are kind enough to invite me, you are right. I shall manage that, and you will help me. But this incident has raised a barrier which Charles and I shall find it difficult to undermine."

"I have every reason to be very much hurt myself, Addy, at the tone of Mr. Snowden's note. What right has he to imply that Mr. Falkener is a frequent visitor here, and to order you out of my house at a minute's notice, as if it were not a fit place for you to be in?"

"Of course he has no right, Georgie; and he will find out that he has been guilty of worse than a crime, for he has made a mistake. Meanwhile I am afraid I have a deal of trouble before me. Nothing will appease my father's anger at what he considers a slight put upon him by Charles. But Charles and I must and will meet, and must and will marry!"

"What do you propose doing, my poor child?" asked Mrs. Oswald.

"First, dear Georgie, I intend doing what looks so much like an act of submission that it surprises even myself. I intend going home, as you perceive. I might insist on remaining here (if you would good-naturedly keep me). But I can act on my father better by facing him than by appearing to brave him out at a distance. There is, however, one thing which fills me with misgiving. Long Jack knows Charles and I are great friends, and Long Jack was sent with this note and delivered it himself. Has he roused my father's apprehensions, do you think?"

"I hope not, for your sake, my dear Addy, though I never could understand Mr. Snowden's being averse to your marrying Mr. Falkener. Still, as there is now this ill-feeling towards him, you will have to be careful. By-the-by, Adelaide, what did you do with my note to you last night?"

The blood rushed to Adelaide's cheek, and she replied hesitatingly,

"I cannot remember. Let me see—where was I sitting? If I dropped it in the verandah, my enemy Long Jack will have picked it up."

"And taken it to your father?"

"You may depend upon it that is what has happened, Georgie. How am I to meet so many troubles at once? Do advise me, my dear friend, what shall I do?"

"First, Addy, I think you are very unwise in allowing yourself to have an enemy in Long Jack. Creatures like that are better friends than foes. Never make an enemy of a member of your own household. If he or she becomes one, get rid of him at once."

"That would not be easy, Georgie, so far as Jack is concerned. My father would never part with him. I have tried it and failed."

"Then try and make him your friend."

"How can I eat so much dirt, Georgie, dear?"

"Never mind, it will all count in the peck we must all eat before we die; and which, in the case of women, is sometimes a peck and a half."

"Can't you help me, Georgie, out of this mess? You know you have your own crow to pick with my father."

"Trust me for doing that, my dear. To-morrow morning early he will receive a little note from me demanding an interview in my own house. He will probably speak to you about it. Give him to understand that I am exceedingly hurt at the tone of his letter to you, and at his calling you away so suddenly and unceremoniously. Frighten him thoroughly. I will do the rest."

The two women embraced and parted.

On her way back to the Cedars Adelaide explained to Nursie all that had happened. She

anxiously inquired of her whether she had found Mrs. Oswald's letter in the pocket of the dress she had worn on the evening before; and on Nursie answering in the negative became more than ever convinced it had fallen into Long Jack's hands.

Arrived at home Adelaide quietly went to her own room to take off her bonnet, and then, with equal quiet and perfect self-possession, entered her father's study. He was standing up as she came in, looking flurried and rather nervous. She confronted him with a grave countenance, and said,

"Why have you sent for me in this extraordinary way? What has happened?"

If Joe Snowden was a bully he was also a coward, and he was generally a coward before Adelaide's imperious and haughty manner. There was, therefore, no refuge for him but at once to go off into a towering rage, and that feat he accomplished to perfection. He stormed and raved against Falkener, and about Sam, and finally about Adelaide's encouraging Fal-

kener as an admirer, which, he added, he never would hear of at any time, under any circumstances, and particularly after the personal affront to himself.

Adelaide sat quietly down in her father's arm-chair by his writing-table, thereby cutting him off from that haven of rest, and leaving him to bluster up and down the room as long as there was any wind in his sails. But after he had said the same thing over and over again, each time with fresh expletives, there remained no more to say; and Adelaide still sat quietly watching the opportune moment for putting in a word. At last when she saw her father mentally and physically exhausted, and very much in the position of a ship after a storm, rolling helplessly in a ground swell, she condescended to speak.

"I have, of course, nothing on earth to do, father, with your quarrel with Mr. Falkener about Sam. If I chose to take up such trifles as those, I should have equal reason with yourself to be indignant. After all, Sam was only

your out-door servant, and a man you were not often brought into contact with; whereas Dinah was as good as my own maid. I do not know that Mr. Falkener has taken her actually into his house. But in providing for the father he has equally provided for the girl, who we have every reason to believe has grossly injured us."

"Why, you fool," burst in the indignant father, "don't you see that is the gist of the whole question? That sneak Falkener is after you, and he has just taken Dinah into his pay that he may get at you."

"Gently, gently, father; I cannot allow you to speak to me in this way of Mr. Falkener, nor to insinuate such things respecting myself and Dinah. Mr. Falkener has only just lost his wife, and you are in a great hurry to make him in love with some one else. But supposing Mr. Falkener were attached to me, there could be no sort of occasion for employing Dinah or anyone else for his purposes. Mr. Falkener, till you chose to pick this silly quarrel with him, was your friend and your guest. If he chose

to pay his addresses to me, and I to accept them, there was nothing to prevent his doing it without any assistance from a low, half-negro girl like Dinah."

"Perhaps you are going to deny, with your cool, plausible ways, that Falkener *is* making love to you? Perhaps, with your hypocritical nonsense about his wife, whom he neglected and hated, being only just dead, you mean to make me believe he is not in love with you. But you can't do it, I tell you; I know better, and I have the proofs in my hand."

"Will you condescend to show me what proofs you have, father?" said Adelaide, very coldly.

"This—this," uttered Mr. Snowden, hoarse with rage, and with his large, coarse hand he smoothed the crumpled letter out before her.

Adelaide glanced at it with a low supercilious laugh, and taking it up, said,

"What nonsense! Do you mean to say you take every silly expression used by one woman in writing to another as a solemn statement of

a fact? Can't Georgie Oswald and I have our small feminine jokes together, without your taking it up in this way, and bringing forward our little notes like documents in a court of justice? Really I've no patience with such twaddle; you disgust me with my home, with you, and with myself, with such scenes and such nonsense. Do you imagine that I don't see Long Jack's influence throughout the whole affair?"

As she spoke, she rose haughtily and stood before him. Mr. Snowden was getting the worst of it, and perceived it. But, resolved to stick to his point, he said,

"Is that man in love with you, Adelaide, or is he not?"

"Really, father, if you want to know, I think you had better ask him yourself. That is, if you cousider doing so quite the most delicate and dignified course you can adopt. Meanwhile, until you have ascertained that point to your own satisfaction, I want to know upon what pretence you expect me to discontinue my

visits to Mrs. Oswald? That is, always supposing she will continue to receive me after the gross insult you have put upon her."

"What insult have I put upon her? I don't know what you mean."

"The insult of summoning your daughter to leave her house at a moment's notice, as if she had the plague; just because you have got up some vulgar quarrel about a carpenter, with which she has nothing whatever to do. Mrs. Oswald is much offended; and, in short, if we are to go on in this style, there will soon not be a house in the neighbourhood with whose inmates we shall be on speaking terms. It comes to this, father: I can't bear it any longer. You have never given me the advantages other girls in my position in Jamaica consider themselves entitled to, and I now claim them at your hands. Send me to England; I have had enough of this."

Joe Snowden staggered back as she spoke, and caught at the back of a chair for support. Adelaide was the only creature in the world he

loved, and her, in his coarse, rude way, he adored. Moreover, his habits of drinking had reduced his nerves to a very shattered condition, and he could not meet a sudden shock with the splendid self-possession of the grandly-developed and finely-constituted being before him. The bare idea of his daughter's leaving him, except by forming some good marriage in the colonies, had never struck him as possible; and now to hear it proposed by herself, and with that look of determination and defiance he knew so well, made him feel as if the very ground were giving way beneath his feet.

"Addy, you are too hasty—you are indeed," he began to stammer forth. "You take up things with such vehemence, and never will listen to reason."

"Well, father," she replied, with a returning smile, or half a smile, for she saw she was already gaining her ground, "I think the vehemence has been more on your side than mine. But we will not quarrel about that; only I want you to understand that, if I am to be

dragged into your quarrels with other men, and am to make myself obnoxious to everybody in consequence, it will be much better that I should leave the place. I could go to your relations in England. You know, my Uncle James always writes most kindly, pressing me to come and make acquaintance with him and my aunt, and all my cousins. I really begin to think it would be a very good plan, for what with one thing and another, my life here is becoming a burden to me."

"Don't say another word about it, Adelaide. You know I can't, and won't, stand it. Deuce take it, girl, what do you want? Don't I do everything in the world I can to please you, like an old fool that I am?"

"I only want you not to quarrel with everybody, father, and not to get up these terrible scenes which make me ill and wretched. The whole of this has been your doing, worked upon by that rascally Jack; and now that you have had your say and made us all miserable, do let bygones be bygones, and then I, for my

part, will consent to remain in Jamaica—at least, for the present."

"Very well, my dear; I won't say any more about it, and I will even offer my apologies to Mrs. Oswald for having called you away so unceremoniously from her house. But I won't see Falkener—I won't forgive him the slight he has put on me, the conceited puppy! I suppose he thinks, because he has got grand relations in England, he can treat Joe Snowden as he pleases. But he shall be made to recollect that out here, at least, I'm the better man of the two, and he may just keep his dandy notions to himself. Now mind that, Adelaide. I won't say you have deceived me, and have allowed him to fall in love with you, when he ought still to be thinking of his poor wife, hardly cold in her grave. But, come what may, he shall not have my daughter!—I'll be d——d if he does! A coxcomb, a whipper-snapper fellow like that, who thinks his handsome face is to carry all before him—I tell you I won't have it! Mrs. Oswald is a very

nice lady, and I have a particular regard for her, and am very sorry I have offended her; but when you go to her house she must keep that young gentleman away, unless she is engaged to be married to him herself, and so I shall tell her."

It was Adelaide's turn now to lean heavily on the nearest support. Her brain reeled at the horrible thought forced on her by her father's concluding words. They called up again the spirit which had haunted her the day and night after the loss of the bracelet. She murmured to herself, "There it is again!" and turned pale.

Her father perceived she looked fatigued, and began internally to blame himself for the long and stormy discussion.

"There, my good girl, come and give your old father a kiss, and let us forget all about it. You shall go back to the Wren's Nest whenever you like; but I suppose some sort of apology will be due to the Wren herself before we can propose that. So that we may consider it is

all made up, with the exception of my quarrel with Falkener, which I shall, of course, say no more about, but which will stand as it does. I suppose he will answer my letter, and I do not suppose he will call me out. If he has been bold enough to think of you at any time, why, he must just forget it again, that's all. We will have no rows, Adelaide, but we will just keep apart; of course you would not think of being cordial with a man I have quarrelled with. If you meet, I don't wish you to cut him; but keep him quietly at a distance, just as my girl knows so well how to do when she pleases," added the foolishly fond father, as he bent forward and stroked her beautiful head, and tried to turn up the face which she kept obstinately down.

He thought as he did so that the tears in her eyes were the result of emotion called forth by his own generous conduct. He little guessed how she was inwardly torn by the cruel mockery of those words, "I don't wish you to cut him."

Cut Charles Falkener, indeed!—the man

whose kiss still seemed warm upon her lips, whose affianced bride she considered herself, and for whose sake she was ready to dare anything.

But an appearance of submission was the only safe course for the present. A word in reply, and she felt she should spring another mine. So, weary and shattered by that one last sentence, she crept away to her room, and there lay meditating and plotting.

CHAPTER II.

IT TAKES TWO TO MAKE A QUARREL.

THE next morning brought two letters to Mr. Snowden. The first was from Falkener. It ran thus:—

"DEAR MR. SNOWDEN,

"I am sorry you are annoyed at your former carpenter's having found a situation with me. I happened to be in immediate want of one, and therefore was induced to engage Sam the moment I happened to find him at liberty. I suppose he is a thief, like all the rest of his race, and I shall have to keep my eyes well open. If you have anything graver or more unusual than that to lay to his charge, I

should be greatly obliged by your putting me on my guard. I cannot believe, my dear sir, that you will make a lasting quarrel with me about an accident like this, and one in which I was so far from intending any offence.

"I remain,

"Yours very truly,

"C. FALKENER."

In writing this note Charles had remembered that he was addressing the man whose son-in-law he hoped before long to become, and he endeavoured to maintain the respect due to that relationship. He was naturally a fine-tempered man, and thought it no humiliation to treat an older man with deference and forbearance. In the present instance, too, his affection for Adelaide was sure to make him act well and generously.

Mr. Snowden was very near being mollified; but he had not a good temper, and he did not understand generosity. His was a low stamp of vulgarity; and the very fact that Charles had

acted like a gentleman sank the snob lower down in his natural snobbishness. He flung aside the letter and sent no answer. The proof that he felt he was in the wrong lay in his not telling Adelaide a word about it. His instinct told him she would have applauded Falkener, and blamed himself.

The second letter was from Mrs. Oswald, couched in these terms :—

"Mrs. Oswald presents her compliments to Mr. Snowden, and would be particularly obliged to him if he would make it convenient to call on her to-day, at any hour he likes to name. She wishes to speak to him on a matter of importance, which requires explanation, and does not admit of delay. The bearer waits for a reply."

He knew, as he read it, that he had fallen into a trap. There was no evading a summons of this nature. Had Mrs. Oswald incautiously alluded to the subject upon which she required to discourse with him, he could have got out of an interview by forestalling her with some

polite but summary reply. But though his guilty conscience told him why the pretty widow requested an interview, he could not take anything for granted and act accordingly. Had he attempted it, Mrs. Oswald would have been quite equal to the occasion. On the spot she would have assured him he was altogether on a wrong tack, and would instantaneously have created some widely different occasion for refusing to see him. He perhaps did not know, as we do, how easily and naturally she would have done this. But he felt he had got his neck in a noose, and must follow where that hand chose to lead him. He felt rather small, and very cowardly, as men are apt to do in little dilemmas which call for moral and not physical courage.

After wondering how he should get out of it, or what he should say to Mrs. Oswald, he decided on conferring with Adelaide. As he was by this time in a subdued and humble frame of mind, he went to look for her instead of sum-

moning her to his study. He put the note into her hand.

"I say, Addy, what's the meaning of this?"

Adelaide looked grave, and did not permit her features to relax for a moment, though she was well aware her father was to receive that note, and already foresaw how the matter would end.

"I think the letter expresses its meaning very clearly, my dear father. Mrs. Oswald wishes particularly to see you on a matter of importance."

"Yes, yes, all that is plain enough. But have you any idea what the matter of importance may be?"

Adelaide answered, slowly and cautiously,

"If you really wish to know my own impressions, I will tell you that I imagine it refers to the way in which you called on me, after all Mrs. Oswald's great and constant kindness to me, to leave her house at a moment's notice, without deigning to give any explanation or offer any apology. Of course I don't know what

Mrs. Oswald's object may be in wishing to see you; but I do know that she was most dreadfully upset by it yesterday. I never saw her so agitated by anything in my life. She talked of sending for Mr. Marshall immediately, to consult with him how she ought to act. She said that in her peculiar and difficult position as a young widow, it was impossible for her to overlook such a slight as that—people would believe you had some good grounds for daring to treat her as no one would treat a lady. I endeavoured to pacify her; but she was inconsolable. She said the respect and regard she had entertained for you made it doubly difficult to bear; that she had always looked upon you as her best and safest friend; and that this was a blow for which she was not in the least prepared. I left her in tears; and I need hardly tell you I have scarcely closed my eyes this night, thinking of her trouble, and feeling I have been made the unwilling and unconscious cause."

"Deuce take it!" muttered Snowden, between

his teeth, feeling himself very much in the position of a man who has incautiously set his foot on a wasp's nest. "I'm sure I did not mean to offend Mrs. Oswald; but I could not allow that impertinent puppy to come philandering after you in her house—after the way he has behaved too. But I don't want to quarrel with her—I like her very much—very much indeed. I am greatly obliged to her for her kindness and attention to you, who have no sisters to amuse you; and I should be very sorry to separate you. But really I don't know—what do you think I had better do, Addy?"

"Why, go down and see her of course, and hear what she has got to say. You cannot do less when a lady, and a friend into the bargain, asks you to call upon her. Only I warn you, father, you must not affront her about Mr. Falkener, because she won't stand it."

"I don't the least want to affront her about that young jackanapes, nor about anything else, I am sure. She had better marry him herself, if she can't do without his visits. Not but what

I think she is too good for him. She ought to have a man more experienced, and rather older; she would not find him enough of a companion. Well, I suppose I had best say I will be with her in an hour's time. The sooner it is over the better."

And he left the room in a penitent and subdued frame of mind. Adelaide hid her face in her hands and wept. Everything seemed slipping from her, and that last cruel stroke, "She had better marry him herself," was too much for her anxious heart and tired nerves. Besides, she knew her father so well. She knew the peculiar obstinacy of his nature in any case where he fancied a slight had been put upon him. He would grant her everything else; she might continue her friendship with Mrs. Oswald, she might do all she pleased, have everything she liked; but she might break her heart before he would sacrifice his offended dignity by passing over a trifle like that which had turned him suddenly from a friend into Charles Falkener's inveterate enemy. There was no generosity in

the man. He could be kind, liberal, even warm-hearted, but not generous. That is a quality which belongs only to noble natures. There are many imitations of it, but it is rare to find the real thing; and when you do, you hail a god among his fellow-men.

Although Joe Snowden was a bully among men, he was a coward with women. Perhaps we are wrong to say a coward, for it is an ugly word, and implies a low, mean creature; but, at any rate, he could not "stand up" to a woman, nor hold his own before woman's wiles. He set out, therefore, for the Wren's Nest in precisely the frame of mind the dog so eloquently expresses by the happy faculty he has of carrying his tail between his legs, and thereby explaining to his own satisfaction, and to the full comprehension of all beholders, exactly what he is feeling. He made a rapid transit through his own garden and the wood; but his pace slackened as he attempted to cross the lawn that ran all round the house. And it was with a timid hand, in the neatest new lavender gloves,

that Mr. Snowden rang a door-bell that seemed to find a mysterious and uncomfortable echo somewhere in his own bowels. He had brushed his hair when he put on his hat, but his mental disquiet and the heat of the day had plastered it with perspiration, except where it had dragged it down in little straight, grizzled aqueducts. Will Mrs. Oswald detect now that the hair is really very grey?

He was shown into the drawing-room, and as the door opened he found himself face to face with his fair enemy. She sat in an arm-chair in deep black. It was months since he had seen her in such deep mourning. Had she lost another near relative? But before he could think whether it would be right to ask her she had risen slowly from her chair, and raising her handkerchief to her face, said, in a gentle, touching voice, behind the cambric folds,

"Oh! Mr. Snowden, how could you act so to me?"

How indeed! And what had he done? What was the enormity of which he was accused?

He began to feel that it must be something more than he had ever intended, or was even aware of. Adelaide had sternly rebuked him, and now this fair and gentle creature was dissolving in tears before his eyes. He felt he was a wretch. No doubt he was. But he would have liked to have known a little more distinctly how and in what way, before he ventured to embark on an ocean of apologies.

"Really, Madam, I was not aware——"

"Not *aware*, Mr. Snowden," rapidly retorted Mrs. Oswald, with an awful emphasis on the last word, as though his use of it were a tremendous aggravation of the original offence; "not aware of the gross insult you have put upon me in ordering your daughter, my own beloved friend, out of my house at a moment's warning? And that, too, in a way to insinuate that Adelaide was not *safe* with me; that my society was unfit for her; that she might come to harm under my roof. And that, too, after I had so trusted you, esteemed you so highly, Mr.

Snowden, reposed such a childlike, affectionate confidence in your friendship."

The handkerchief had been removed during this burst of real eloquence, and two large, dewy blue-grey eyes had been fully fixed on Mr. Snowden's red, hot, and disturbed physiognomy. While speaking she had sunk back again into the arm-chair, and somehow she seemed thereby to remove herself further from the possible pleadings of her already penitent foe.

"Will you listen to me, my dear madam; will you hear how far I was, and am, from intending anything so painful to you?"

"Oh, Mr. Snowden, you forgot my sad position—you forgot that I am still young and a widow, when you put that cruel slur upon me, and so lowered me in the eyes of your own child."

"Good God! my dear Mrs. Oswald, it is all a mistake. I assure you it is a mistake. The fact is you will have that young Falkener here; and I've quarrelled with him, and I don't

choose that Adelaide should meet him, here or anywhere. But there is no insult meant to you, my dear lady; how could you think of such a thing? I have a profound admiration and respect for you. I am delighted Adelaide should enjoy your very agreeable society. Only I won't have her with that jackanapes, who unfortunately happens to be your landlord."

The sofa was close behind the arm-chair, and in order to bring himself somehow on a level with his adversary, Mr. Snowden had seated himself on the sofa, thus placing himself rather behind her. He had laid his hand on the low back of the chair. She turned her pretty tearful face towards him, and the golden ringlets touched his hand, bringing back the sensation he remembered so well the first time he had walked round his garden with her. There was that in his face which told her she had won the day; and with the quick tact of a woman, she ceased firing the moment her artillery had done its work.

"Mr. Snowden, you have a perfect right to decide whom Addy shall meet, and whom she shall avoid. But you might have communicated first with me, and not have ordered Adelaide out of my house."

"Well, I daresay there I made a mistake. You know, Mrs. Oswald, I am a rough man, and, as I have told you before, don't find it very easy to look after a beautiful headstrong girl like my Adelaide; and so from time to time I become frightened lest she should get beyond me. I tell you again I've quarrelled with Falkener. Addy may come to your house whenever you will let her; but she must not meet Charles Falkener."

"Then why did you not write to me?"

"Because Adelaide was here, and would have read the letter."

"You should have trusted to my tact, Mr. Snowden."

"Ah, my dear lady, that is what you must not expect a man like me to do in such a case.

I know Falkener is always here. I do not mean my daughter to see him, and so I sent for her to come home. Now that's the plain state of the case. You dear ladies are very charming with your tact and your pretty ways, but you are not logical. You think the long way round is the shortest road. You see I am an old lawyer, and I argue differently."

"Do you think you are wise?" said Mrs. Oswald, in an entirely pacified voice, and having adroitly dropped her grievance at once—"or, if you will allow me to say so, quite just in forbidding Addy ever to meet Mr. Falkener? I am always afraid of those sudden violent measures producing scandal—particularly in a small society like ours."

"D—— the small society! I beg your pardon, my dear madam, I do indeed. But I stick to my point. Falkener has affronted me—you know what I mean—in a way no young man should behave to his elders. I would not put up with it in an equal. I ask you whether I

am likely to do so in a man who I know aspires to become my son-in-law?"

"Do you think, Mr. Snowden, that Adelaide cares for him?"

"I can't say. I hope not. By Jove! I should be in a fix if she did; for, as you know, she carries all before her."

Mr. Snowden for the moment looked as if a precipice yawned at his feet; and Mrs. Oswald smiled at the contrast between his abject fear of his beloved daughter, and his obstinate opposition to her real happiness where it clashed with his selfish and preconceived notions.

"Then what do you wish me to do about it, Mr. Snowden?"

"First of all, I wish you to forgive me, my dear Mrs. Oswald."

"That I will," she replied, and a little soft hand, very cool to the touch, crept under the ringlets and lay for a second on the warm brawny paw which still rested on the back of her chair.

"Secondly, I ask you to have Adelaide as

much here as ever you will. Amuse her, talk to her, reason with her, keep her out of mischief; and just manage that Falkener should not find Mrs. Oswald at home if he should happen to call when Adelaide is with you."

"Is there no hope, dear Mr. Snowden, of your some day taking a different view of that question? I am sure Mr. Falkener never meant to offend you—that I will pledge you my word for. He is attached to Adelaide; he will be very rich; he is well well-connected; and, as you know, he is very handsome."

"No, no, that I deny. He is tall and well-built, I grant you, but I hate chestnut hair in a man, with a complexion that might be a woman's. However, that has nothing to do with it. I don't care about his money, Addy will have enough of her own. As for his connections, I don't believe they are anything to boast of, and I should not value them if they were. I am a republican, Mrs. Oswald, as regards a man's birth. I maintain one man is born as good as another."

"But you are not a republican, are you, as regards property?"

"No, I tell you candidly I am not—since I have had any of my own. I think what a man is *born* to he has no right to. What he *makes* he should keep. But we are wandering from our point. I shall never alter my views as regards Falkener and my daughter."

"But if Adelaide is to be very unhappy? Surely, dear Mr. Snowden, you could not bear that?"

She looked up full in his face, and the tears of sympathy stood in her eyes. He paused, and then said—

"Nonsense, Mrs. Oswald! Addy will get over it. She is not tender-hearted, as you are. She has a strong will and a passionate temper; but she would never break her heart for any man."

"That's all he knows about it," thought Mrs. Oswald to herself. But what was the use of arguing? He never would see, and was incapable of understanding. The only thing that

was left her to do was to catch at the promise that Adelaide should come to her whenever she pleased. And perhaps time might, after all, soften matters, and bring him round to other views. At all events, Adelaide would have all her sympathy, and she might still be a sort of silent, only half acknowledged go-between for the two parted lovers.

"It would be indiscreet to urge you further, Mr. Snowden. I am a little fearful about Adelaide. She is more tender-hearted than you think. But I will say no more about that now, reserving to myself the privilege of a friend to renew the subject later on, if I find I must do so."

"I can refuse you none of the privileges of friendship, my dear lady. But then you must let me claim them in return."

"Certainly; but in what way?"

They were still sitting in the same position, and she turned further round to face him better, and looked at him earnestly. He suddenly looked a little disconcerted, and said,

"May I give you one piece of advice?"

"A thousand, if you will."

"Falkener is not to come here after Adelaide. Don't let him come after somebody else."

"Whom do you mean?"

"I mean your fair self, my dear lady. He is too young for you—too unformed. You should marry a man *qui a fait ses preuves*" (Mr. Snowden had read a few French novels). "You are a woman of too much heart and too sound sense to marry a boy. Now you must forgive me, and look on me as an old friend, who never, no, never, my dear, had any intention of offending you, and who has your welfare much at heart."

He rose as he said the last words, and before she could do the same, and offer her hand to bid him farewell, one brief kiss was pressed upon the parting of her brown-gold hair, as he stook behind her, and in a second he was gone.

"That's done," said Mrs. Oswald simply, as

she leant back in the chair, looking a little weary, and not deeming it necessary to ring and have her guest shown out in form.

As Mr. Snowden left the house, this time slowly sauntering home, he rather wondered to himself what had happened to him. He was in so totally a different frame of mind (always excepting his resolution on one point) that he could hardly recognise himself. He might have sung the nursery rhyme opportunely, "If I be I, as I suppose I be," and his obstinate quarrel with Falkener was the surly dog at home who might furnish him with a sense of his identity.

The tremor with which he had sought Mrs. Oswald's presence had given place to a calm and somewhat pretentious sense of successful dignity. He was not quite sure whether, as regarded the interview he had just had with Mrs. Oswald, it was he who had done it so well, or she who had been so successful. If, however, his vanity might have suffered a little at the idea of his being outwitted by anyone,

there was always his comfortably obstinate decision about Charles Falkener to fall back upon. No one could say he was weak, when even pretty Mrs. Oswald's pleadings had not moved him a hair's breadth in favour of the man his poor daughter loved. He had been grandly decisive on that score, and it was pleasant to think of. He was sure Mrs. Oswald appreciated him. How prettily she laid her hand on his, in token of peace! Yes, she was a charming woman—impulsive yet gentle, as a woman ought to be; very tender-hearted. Pretty dear! with those china-blue eyes of hers full of tears. Ah! well, it would be a pleasant thing to have a nice sweet-tempered woman like that to welcome you home.

And why not? Then came a still, small voice—a poor little voice that had grown husky from long disuse, but which still tried to make its faint whisper heard from time to time—and the voice told Joe Snowden that he had a way of coming home that was not altogether suited for a delicate or a high-spirited woman

to witness. Feeble reminiscences of himself flitted through his brain, of reeling into his house aided by Long Jack, and Adelaide getting quickly out of his way and locking her door. Poor Adelaide! That proud brow had been dyed with shame again and again at sight of her own father. Even through the haze of his intoxication he had seen her dark eyes flash and her mouth curl with indignation, and he had felt the sting pierce the dreamy, half-delirium of drink, and found it still sticking in his heart when sober sense returned. Yes, it was his rage against himself that made him give way to such bursts of rage against others. When he swore and raved at a servant, half the time it was the inward rage provoked by his own upbraiding conscience. He hated himself then, and it is not possible for a man to hate himself with the loathing of despair without hating all around him. It is self-hatred that points the malice of the lost spirits.

Joe Snowden had his moments of self-hatred, and then he was terrible to see. And yet he

was far from being altogether bad. There were genial spots in the man's nature, which, when you came upon them, were even attractive. No one could see him in his better moments with Adelaide without feeling he was never meant to be a lost man, and that he never could be altogether a bad man. He was vulgar, of course; his breeding and antecedents had been all vulgar. But the vulgar man may have his good points, when he for a time forgets the pretentiousness and avoids the coarseness which alone constitute true vulgarity. A natural unassuming man or woman may want all the charm of educational and traditional refinement, the ease and polish of manner which frequenting good society may give, but they are never really vulgar.

Joe Snowden, the *ci-devant* country town attorney, the frequenter of the bar in the leading inn of the said town, the popular writer of a scurrilous and liberal county paper, the secret fomenter of many a low piece of litigation amongst his neighbours, was doubly a vulgar

man when he grew into a wealthy Jamaica planter, with the pretensions of a gentleman and a leading man; and yet even his prosperity had brought out some of the better points of his natural character. There was a certain open-handed liberality as regarded money-matters that might have done honour to many a niggardly lord. It was not, perhaps, a perfectly unadulterated Christian virtue, and a leaven of ostentation may have defiled it; but it is always pleasant to see a man *give*, and Joe Snowden was not mean as regarded money. Neither his daughter nor his dependents could complain of him on this score, and what he did with his money he did with his personal patronage. He would have stood up for pretty Mrs. Oswald, or for any other woman, had she needed a protector. He would have gone the length of fighting a duel for her reputation, if only his hand had been steady enough to point a pistol. But then "the drink," as the Irish technically term it, ruined all, and lowered him in his own eyes as in everybody else's—

perhaps most in his own. No, no. There was no tender, gentle woman's greeting possible for poor Joe when he should come home at the end of a hot Jamaica day. A proud girl like Adelaide, born to it, steeped in it from her infancy, had managed to carry her head high in spite of it. But oh! the cruel look of scorn that came back to Snowden through the misty phantasmagoric recollections of his fits of intoxication!

It rose before him in acute memory, as it had done again and again when he had come rushing into his house, and she, perhaps, had half crossed the hall to meet him, and had turned back again with that scornful lip, going on into the dim shadow of a distance his bleared eyes could hardly detect, her handsome tall form doubling and dividing before him as his own besotted senses swam, but leaving always fixed in perception then, and in memory after, that proud and withering scorn. He would turn away to the supporting arm of Long Jack, and swear at her as he did so, and confide to his

negro valet some imprecation on the daughter he adored. And Jack would grin, and betray those ivory teeth, and that peculiar animal expression which specially belonged to him when his sympathies were awakened by his master in his master's favour.

All this came before Joe Snowden as he walked slowly through the wood, and mounted the terrace of his own garden. Why did they come, those hateful visions, and wipe out the pretty picture of fair Mrs. Oswald's golden curls, and that white throat and cool hand, and his own venturesome kiss, and, above all, the passing thought of whether the next attempt in that line might not be a bolder one. No, no, Joe Snowden, go back to your cups and your grovelling ways. You have fashioned your life with your own hands, and so you must keep it. It is too late now to do aught else but drink and drivel to the end; probably die the death of the drunkard, and then be parched with the drunkard's thirst through all eternity. And yet you are no fool, Joe Snowden. You are a sharp-

witted, and have been an eminently successful man. You have determination enough to keep up a quarrel with a young neighbour you have been fond of, and kind to, and who perhaps—nay, more than perhaps—has stolen poor Addy's heart. And yet, for all that power of determination, you cannot forswear the one glass too much.

Too late! too late! You might have done it when you were younger—you cannot now. And so the devil took up the theme of remonstrance which the guardian angel had begun, and suggested despair as the former had suggested amendment. He caught the tone of the angel's voice, he walked by Joe's side as the former had done, and wove in his arguments so adroitly that Joe knew not where the angel ceased speaking, and the demon began. It seemed all to come from the same voice, and it preached despair. "Go on, unhappy man, go on! It is too late to mend, too late!"

Joe Snowden did as men will do when they come to this point. With one last twist of the

power of volition he strangled the good thought, and called up bluster and bravado in its stead. His imagination ran back to poor Mrs. Oswald as in her presence it had not dared to riot, and then forward to the glass that might await him in his own house. The little morning dream of virtue was paling before the glow of less creditable visions, and swinging his walking-stick among the tuberoses and heavy-scented flowers of the parterre, he sang, in what had once been a rich baritone, the first stanza of an old drinking ballad:—

"I've oft been asked by plodding fools,
And men of no renown,
What joys there are in draining bowls,
And tippling all night long.
But though such plodding fools I scorn,
For once I'll not disdain
To tell them why I drink till morn,
And fill my glass again."

CHAPTER III.

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER.

"THAT'S done," had been the quiet ejaculation of Mrs. Oswald as her visitor departed. There was no vanity in the exclamation; no exultant feelings at having mastered the man who might have bullied her. It was her habit, and the long use of it had deadened triumph. She could always do it when she chose—at least, she had never been known to fail; and now once more she had gained her point quite as far as she had expected to do. Adelaide was free to come to her house as much as she liked. The question of her not meeting Falkener had been trusted to her keeping and

observance; and for all the rest Mr. Snowden was her very humble servant, and ready at any moment to be her slave. She knew very well she had only to raise her finger to bring him, grey hairs, and money-bags, and coffee-fields, all to her feet.

Meanwhile she could befriend Adelaide—act as go-between for her and Falkener, and watch the lucky moment when a reconciliation with the father might be effected. She would do the work honestly by poor Adelaide, and be her best friend. And it was not unpleasant to have such good reasons for encouraging Charles Falkener's visits. She did not know herself well enough—for with all her experience of life there was many an unexplored corner in her own heart, the closed door of which she passed day after day and left unopened—to be fully aware of how precious the thought of his frequent visits was becoming to her. She had very serious intentions of marrying again, but she had not yet set herself to make any selection as to whom she would take. And probably

she thought, as she certainly would have said had she been asked, that Mr. Snowden had as good a chance as any other man. There was as little introspection in her nature as was well nigh possible in a reasonable educated being. She was too mere a woman to act otherwise than from her own spontaneous impulses, which, as we have seen, were essentially feminine, and generally benevolent, though often a little wily. So she acted, and so she felt. And the action over, it produced as little consciousness and self-questioning as the snatches of song, or the smoothing and ruffling of his bright plumage, produces reflection in the bird that hops from branch to branch of his leafy bower. She felt very sorry for Adelaide, but full of hope that it would all come right in the end; and she never said to herself what a dangerous game she was playing in being the intimate friend, in another woman's interest, of such a man as Charles Falkener.

She sat some time exactly in the attitude in which Snowden had left her—looking dreamily

before her, thinking a little of him, of what a dear old fool he was; and a good deal of poor Adelaide, and the barriers to her happiness which were rising up all around her. She knew it was very selfish and hard of Mr. Snowden to oppose, on a question of mere personal pique, a marriage so calculated in every way to make his only daughter happy. But she felt sure this must come right in the end, even if she had to make him desperately in love with herself, and enforce this as the condition of becoming his wife.

She had got to this point in her reverie, and mentally saw him with the bluff red face and the grizzled hair and a certain rotundity of person, when suddenly her imagination, like a restive horse, shied at the vision, and Charles's rich auburn locks and well-knit, shapely form rose before her. She got up quickly from her recumbent position, as though the thought had stung her. Yet it was a pleasant mental vision, and she deftly put away from her the question of why it made her start,

and of why, when she had smilingly contemplated the ugly form of Joe Snowden, she could not even sit still to face that of a young Adonis.

Mrs. Oswald, as we have said before, was not given to much minute examination of conscience. But something or other made her instantly turn to her writing-table and hastily indite these words: "Come, my own dear friend, come at once, and let us calmly talk it over. Things are not so bad as they seem. Your devoted Georgie." She put it into a cover, addressed it to Adelaide, and sent it off immediately. But somehow she did not calm down again so quickly as was her wont. She walked restlessly about, the blue eyes had a wandering motion, and her lips, never very full, had a knack of growing thinner, which they now exhibited. At length she seemed to have taken a desperate resolve, which drove her once more to pen and ink, and she directed a note to Mr. Falkener in these words: "I *must* see you, either this evening or early to-morrow.

But do not on any account come till I send for you. Mr. Snowden has been here." A second messenger took it, and then she relapsed once more into her normal state; and the weary black robes that had served to remind Mr. Snowden of her youthful widowhood were exchanged for a lighter and less doleful fabric.

Meanwhile the dark clouds of a hundred stormy feelings were gathering thicker and faster over the mental horizon of poor Adelaide sitting alone in the house she was beginning to hate. Whichever way her thoughts turned there was no place of rest for the sole of her foot. Her father's senseless obstinacy, Long Jack's demoniacal hatred, a certain undefined and utterly unexpressed fear lest Charles's love should bear the test of separation and difficulty less well than hers, and last, but not least, an agony, fathomless, yearning, and unspeakable, lest Georgiana, her only friend, the only person who *could* help her, and the one she *must* make use of, should prove untrue.

The hurricane of jealousy had swept over

her soul once before, as we have seen; and it had made many a blasted and barren spot where hope had been green and blossoming before. The giant demon had left the print of his footsteps upon her soul, and where he had once been joy could never flourish again.

It seemed to her as if her youth were passing away, slipping out of her grasp without having fulfilled its promise of flower and fruit; for what would all life be if Charles should cease to love her, and Georgiana prove untrue? She had been silent to her father as to how that note which had aroused his suspicions had fallen into his hands; but she knew for certain it was Jack's doing, and she did not care to question her father about it, because the doing so would seem to attach importance to words she had pretended to treat as women's gossip with each other. But it cost Adelaide a bitter struggle to pretend to any indifference she did not feel, and she chafed at the bit she had placed between her own lips.

The agony lay in her inability to discover

how she had better act; what must be the next step; how she was to circumvent all the snares, real or imaginary, which surrounded her. She might be fighting with shadows. She might be vainly tormenting herself. Perhaps at that moment Charles was only thinking of how to see her, and how to arrange for their flight together, or at least for some desperate previous struggle to win her father over to their views. And Georgiana, too, might be plotting a hundred kinds of expedients for bringing them together. That she should not meet Charles was of course out of the question. Meet they must and would, though it be at midnight under the catalpa tree. But then there was her old enemy Long Jack, and with that thought her heart seemed to melt with terror.

In the midst of these bitter cogitations Mrs. Oswald's note was put into her hand, and she felt at once the relief of having something to do, and some one to see who might possibly throw light on the darkness around her. She lost as little time as possible in hastening to the Wren's

Nest, and there found her friend anxiously awaiting her, and with evident arrangements made for their spending a long evening together. Georgiana folded her in her arms as she entered the room, and for the moment neither spoke. Then Adelaide, ghastly white, slipped from her friend's embrace into a chair and said,

"Tell me all. What did my father say?"

"He was very obdurate, my dear. Perfectly kind to *me*—that has nothing to do with it—but very obdurate about you and Charles Falkener."

"Did you not urge upon him the folly and madness of such conduct, Georgie? Did you not point out to him that in every point of view the marriage should rather flatter than displease him? And, above all, didn't you assure him of the folly, the utter folly, of attempting to coerce me when my affections are given as they are to Charles, and my word pledged?"

"You forget, my poor dear child, that had I done all that, and done it at once, I should have for ever ruined our cause. Your father's sus-

picions are roused as to your caring for Charles Falkener, but he has no idea how far things have gone between you; and, irritated as he already is, it would have driven him to madness to have told him the truth. Indeed, my poor darling, the only course for you to pursue is to let the whole question appear to lie by for the present, until he has forgotten his anger, and then *I* will renew it."

These last words were like vinegar on an open wound to poor Adelaide's jealous and exclusive nature. The idea of anyone having to plead for her and her lover, of anyone even daring to suggest the wisdom of a partial separation! Was not Charles all her own, by the indisputable right of an intense mutual affection which made them all in all to each, and nothing to anybody else? Time, patience, prudence! What did such words mean when she only asked, nay, when she claimed as a right, to walk out into the wide world hand in hand with him, and defy all who should dare oppose them.

They debated long and deeply. At times Adelaide nearly quarrelled with Georgiana, and many another woman would not have borne with her petulance and unreasonableness. She had expected Mrs. Oswald to accede at once to her request that Falkener should be sent for, then and there, to meet her that evening; and she was nearly vowing she would never enter the house again, when Mrs. Oswald pleaded the confidence reposed in her by Mr. Snowden.

"But surely, Georgiana, you allow that Charles and I *must* meet, and meet soon, too, after all that has occurred, to settle our plans, and understand each other's wishes? The thing is absolutely necessary, and you can hardly imagine we shall not do it. Then why not make it easy to us, and save me from the spying of that hateful negro, by letting us meet under your roof?"

"Certainly, my dear Addy, you must meet sooner or later. I am well aware of that. But for heaven's sake have a little patience, and do not increase your own difficulties by such im-

petuosity. Surely, my darling, your confidence in Charles Falkener's affection is too secure to allow of a moment's doubt of his faithfulness to you, because some days, or say even some weeks, elapse without your meeting?"

Adelaide made no reply. Her head was bowed on her hands, and she groaned feebly. Long after Georgiana remembered that groan. In other lands, in far distant scenes, when the remembrance of Adelaide came before her, it was with her head bowed, and with the echo of that low, inarticulate groan. It was like the agony of a beautiful dumb animal.

By degrees Adelaide yielded—at least in a manner—to the gentle and soothing influence of Georgiana's presence and conversation. She herself commissioned her friend (for in her great strait what could she do, despite her occasional acute misgivings, but trust her cause into her hands?) to see Charles for her, and left several messages. Georgiana promised to deliver them *verbatim*.

"But how soon will you see him, Georgie dear?"

She would not say to-night. She at that moment decided it should not be to-night, but she promised for the next day. And they were to meet the following morning, for Mrs. Oswald had offered to dine at the Cedars, and could then tell Adelaide all that had passed. When she had grown a little calmer, and had talked the matter well over, she began to feel again the desire for solitude. Her heart was too tempest-tossed to care for conversation. Everything was an effort. And even the talking of Charles was hardly a relief. It was rather, to one of Adelaide's natural intensity of feeling, a desecration. No one had talked to her before of her love, her one treasure, the sealed and secret fountain of her heart. And now the light of common day streamed in upon it, and oh! the freshness, the sweetness, the silent joy of those secret stolen waters was gone, or, at the least, tainted by the touch of common life.

When Adelaide had reached home Mrs. Oswald debated with herself whether or not she should send for Falkener that evening. An indescribable sentiment prevented her doing so. She meant to be thoroughly faithful to Adelaide's cause, because Adelaide was her friend. But there was an underlying feeling that the moment might come when this would be difficult, and therefore she would postpone events rather than hurry them on.

When Adelaide was gone she took so far pity on Falkener's impatience, and the state of uncertainty into which her first note had thrown him, as to write another, begging him to come early the next day. When he did so she perceived he wore an air of languor which pervaded his whole person. The day was not exceptionally hot, but he complained of it as such. He was altogether in a complaining mood. He complained bitterly of Mr. Snowden, of his ungentlemanly and vulgar conduct. He complained greatly of his new carpenter, whom he called a mere peg to hang a quarrel on, and

who, he said, had already proved himself a tiresome rascal as well as a dishonest one. Of Adelaide he spoke plaintively—

"Poor darling!—tell her she must have patience. She cannot doubt me—that would be too absurd, not to say ungrateful. It will all come right as regards her father's absurd opposition. And if it does not, why, we must do it without his consent, that's all. Only do, dear Mrs. Oswald, beg her not to precipitate affairs. Of course it is a great bore having to wait. If I had my will I would call and fetch her to the church this very hour. But it cannot make any real and ultimate difference. A month or two will set it right, and then we shall both be glad we have waited till everything could be done properly and decorously."

"I will tell her what you say. But will you not write to her yourself, Mr. Falkener? There can be no harm in your doing that, seeing how you stand to each other; and I am sure it would be more satisfactory to Adelaide. You can find other means of conveying the letter to

her than by my hands, as I should have a little scruple about taking it myself."

"Oh! yes, of course I will write to her. But I think you had better see her first, poor dear child, and tell her what I have said to you. It is not easy for a man to preach patience to a woman—that is not his part."

"I see. I will do as you bid me. And now tell me about little George. Is the dear child, do you think, *quite* recovered from that tiresome little attack he had?"

And so they drifted off into quiet talk; and Charles's complaining mood gave way under the influence of a cool room, a placid companion, and the absence of too much demand on his head or his heart.

Meanwhile a very different conference had taken place at the Cedars. Adelaide had called for Nursie to come and sit by her as she lay in the shade on the blue silk cushion of her hammock. The intensity of her sufferings had softened her, and the depth of her humiliation

rendered her ready and willing to take advice from anyone.

"Tell me, Nursie darling, what I am to do. I feel so surrounded by toils and snares I don't know which way to turn."

"Ah! my Nini," replied the fond and sagacious woman, going back with all a woman's instinct to the familiarity of former days, while she discoursed on that sentiment which makes all women kin, the sentiment of love, the great leveller—"my pretty Nini, the shortest road is always the best in these matters, though it's apt to be the steepest."

"And what may that road be?"

"Why, to give him up, to be sure; then, if he really wants you, he will come and take you; and if he doesn't, you're well out of it, my darling."

"Now, Nursie, don't talk nonsense. I can only give up Charlie with my life. The question is not how we are to separate, but how we are to come together."

"If that's all, darling, he'll find the way soon enough, don't you fret yourself."

"But I must help him, Nursie; we must meet."

"Can't your new friend down at Wren's Nest manage that, dearie?"

"She could if she chose; but she considers herself bound in honour to my father not to do it."

"You have met him before now in your own garden."

"That's true; but then there is that horrid Long Jack. I am more afraid of him than ever. You see he has already betrayed me to my father in carrying him that letter. He is determined to have his revenge upon me, because he knows I hate him."

Nursie paused for a few minutes, and a variety of fleeting expressions passed over her mobile features. She seemed to be looking far away into other regions, where objects not familiar to her she was talking to rose before her mental vision. Then she called back into

herself that far-off look, and turning her large, deep, unfathomable eyes full on Adelaide's face, said gravely,

"It is not for one like me to suggest to her darling Nini what she should do. We are of another race, and though I partly belong to yours, no drop of my blood runs in your white veins. Nature is stronger with us than with you; and when we want to gain a thing, we are not too proud to do what nature teaches us."

"Now, Nursie, you are too mysterious for me. When you once begin talking in that way I cannot follow you. What on earth would nature teach you in a case like mine?"

"She would teach me to be cautious and wily, and make pretence, and so get at all I wanted. Nini is too proud for that."

"Oh! Nursie, Nursie!" cried the impassioned girl, throwing her arms round the woman's neck, "I am not proud now—I am too miserable for pride. I would do anything—yes, anything in the world to be sure of making

this end well, and to be sure of Charles."

"Then, my darling, you must make friends with Long Jack."

"How is that possible? Think, Nursie, what you are saying. The thing is as impossible as for me to tame a rattlesnake. I have no influence over the monster, and he knows he has my father's ear. He hates me, and I hate him, and he has done so ever since I was a little child, and used to fly into a passion and strike him for being ugly."

"That may be all true; but though Jack is a nigger and ugly, he is a man for all that. If you can't make him help you, at least you can prevent his harming you; and if you don't succeed in doing it, Long Jack will find out all your secrets and prevent all your plans. Ah! my Nini, he has not got the old Maroon blood in him for nothing! You whites, with all your book-learning, are not half so cunning as the black men of the mountains and the woods, amongst whom Long Jack still has ties of kindred."

"How can I win him, Nursie? Money won't do it."

"Money won't do it to begin with. Missy must watch her opportunity, and get to talk to him. Begin little by little, and not too suddenly. The day will come when money will help, but not yet."

"Cannot you help me, Nursie?"

"No, not with Long Jack. He knows too many secrets," said Nursie, in a lower voice and with a sigh, "for me to do anything with him. But if you can get Jack's prying out of the way, of course I can help you with Mr. Charles."

"But I want you to do that at once, Nursie. I want you to see him for me. You could call to ask after the child—there would be nothing in that; and then tell him all, and find out what can be done about our meeting. Meanwhile I will watch my opportunity and see what I can make of Long Jack."

"That's a wise, good Missy," said the woman, rising and kissing her darling as she lay

back in her hammock, the flickering light from the faintly swaying leaves of the acacia throwing bright flecks and dark shadows athwart her face and form, as though they loved to linger near her and had a sense of how they enhanced the grace and beauty of her presence.

A few more express messages to Falkener, a few more promises that she would do her utmost about securing Long Jack's future goodwill, and then Nursie left her on her errand, and Adelaide lay ruminating and planning what to do next. With respect to the part she had to play with Jack, she decided that no forethought could avail her. She could only resolve that she would follow her own instinct the first moment there seemed to be an opening, though she foresaw how she would have to master her intense repugnance in doing so. Nevertheless, to get Jack to be her friend, or at least neutral, was now absolutely necessary, and no sacrifice was too great to attain that end.

Nursie braved the heat of the day, and stole out unobserved to Falkener's house. She said

she had come with a message from the Cedars about Master George, and was soon shown into Falkener's room. She found him, having just awoke from his siesta, still recumbent, and smoking. He did not think it necessary to observe ceremony with the old nurse; and so Nursie, whose sentiments and perceptions were far more refined and subtle than people imagined who did not know her well and had no idea of her past history, had an opportunity of studying him *en deshabille.*

He made her take a chair opposite him, and continued to smoke his cigar as he talked to her. Nursie delivered her message with great dignity, attenuating nothing of the warmth and energy of her darling's expressions, and yet so calm and self-possessed herself that she in no way compromised her young mistress. Charles listened eagerly, and Nursie watched him narrowly. His shirt collar was thrown open on account of the heat, and she marked the full white throat, sloping away with no perceptible break from the well-formed head,

and the close, thick auburn curls clustering at the back.

It was firm and statuesque, and though Nursie did not know that word she had the instinct of its meaning. His hands were very white, but a few dark hairs marked the outline and redeemed them from effeminacy, quite as much so as the look of strength with the straight fingers, neither fleshy nor bony, and the transparent almond-shaped nails. She looked well at him —her darling's darling; and she did not wonder at Adelaide's love for him. His manner was very different from what it had been with Mrs. Oswald a few hours ago. The presence of Adelaide's old nurse, and the simple strength with which she told her message and described Adelaide's state of mind, touched another chord in the man's nature.

He was very eager about their meeting, and many plans were discussed and rejected. At length it was decided that the next day but one Adelaide should arrange to go down with Nursie to Wren's Nest, there to dine and sleep. They

were to leave home together; but, as they would come on foot, they would take the narrow path which led to the self-same rock from whence Adelaide had witnessed the duel so long ago, as now it seemed. Nursie would arrive alone at the Wren's Nest on one pretence or another, and at the end of a certain time would return to the trysting-place and fetch Adelaide. The only thing to be dreaded was lest the heavy rains which might now any day be expected should put an end to this arrangement.

"Could you not meet us to-morrow, sir? It would give us a better chance."

"Impossible, my dear Nursie. I am pledged to be with Williams, miles away, to look over a new cotton plantation he has been making, and it is impossible to put him off."

"And if the rain should come to-morrow, what are we to do then?"

"We must hope it won't come to-morrow, Nursie. Deuce take the cotton! I wish I had not made this appointment. But it cannot be

helped; we must hope for the best; and if the rain comes we must hit on some other plan. I will see what I can do with Mrs. Oswald. I really do think she might help us."

Nursie, having received all her directions, stood up to take leave. He came close to her and took her two soft, flexible hands in his own. The contrast was very great. It was the contrast of race, yet each with its own beauty. There was subtlety in her light mesmeric touch, very different from the firm and less sensuous strength of his. He raised her hands slowly to his lips; he pressed a long kiss on them, and letting them drop, said,

"Now, Nursie, take to my darling the kiss I have laid on your hands, and tell her that is my message, with all it means."

Nursie had a tear in her dark eye as she said to him in reply,

"God bless you, sir! May God stand by you as you stand by her!"

Nursie did not leave the house without seeing Master George. But Mary was cold and

distant, and Nursie knew her darling was not loved in that quarter. When she got home she found Adelaide in a fever of impatience, which was not allayed by hearing she had two more days to wait before she should see Falkener. Nursie was a delightful person to send on a commission, for she had the art of giving every detail in a clear and graphic way that painted it before you like a picture. There was only one point on which she kept her own counsel, and that was as regarded the probabilities of the rainy season setting in on the very next day. Nursie, being a native of Jamaica, and having the peculiarly subtle instinct of her race, saw many tokens which escaped other eyes that the moment was approaching. She not only saw it, but she felt it. In every fibre of her susceptible frame she prognosticated the coming torrent, and feared it would not be postponed till after the meeting among the rocks. Still she might be wrong, and it was worse than useless to infect Adelaide with fears that might never be realized. In all else nothing

could be more satisfactory than her account. She described Falkener, his easy manner, his good looks, his dear smile when he listened to her account of Adelaide, the tears in his eyes when he heard of her anxiety and grief, the warm energy of his manner, and the kiss by proxy at the end.

Adelaide's spirits rose as high as before they had sunk low, and she felt that all that was needed was a little more control of her own wild heart, to secure in the end the goal of her life—the presence for ever of her first, last, and only love.

She even bore with philosophy the announcement that her father had brought back Oliver Standing to dinner. What did it matter to her? She saw how pointless and tactless her father's conduct was in doing so, as if the moment he had forbidden her encouraging the attentions of one man she was therefore to make herself ready to receive those of another.

But she could afford to laugh at his coarse mistake, and to amuse herself rather than

otherwise at its consequences. Moreover, with the greediness of an all-absorbing affection, she was looking forward to the hearing all Mrs. Oswald would have to tell her of her interview with Falkener. It mattered not that the report of him brought by Nursie was of a later date than what Mrs. Oswald could tell her; it would still be the beloved words of the one being whose sentences were preserved in her memory, like bright flies in amber. It never for a moment struck her that Mrs. Oswald's account would be in another key. Her fears and half suspicions had been allayed by Nursie's glowing report; her imagination was filled with the pictures of Charles in his solitary home thinking of her. And with something of the maiden's sense of mystery and of the unknown, she fancied him alone in the ease and familiarity of every-day life, and wondered, as poor Psyche had done, when and how she would penetrate that sanctum which was still closed to her, but of which in time she was to be the priestess and the mistress.

There seemed to be no obtrusiveness in Nursie's daring to talk of Falkener's feelings towards her, as there had been when Mrs. Oswald spoke about him. The simple eloquence of Nursie's language had done nothing towards unveiling or desecrating the sacred mystery of her feelings. Nursie might be the channel of Falkener's sentiments, but that was very different from becoming a go-between. She lent no colours of her own to the sweet things she transmitted to her listener. But whether consciously or not, Mrs. Oswald had an individuality, and even a certain pretension, which wounded Adelaide's exclusiveness. But Nursie had put her in such good humour that for the moment she forgot all that had hitherto seemed to her obtrusive in Georgiana's manner of detailing all she wished to hear, and she was simply and honestly longing for more of the same delicious aliment.

Full of these expanded feelings, she took a certain amount of pains with her toilet, out of the sheer sunniness of her own heart, and allowed

Nursie to bestow extra labour in dressing her, quite oblivious of the fact that possibly young Standing might be foolish enough to imagine she had thought of his presence, and meant to please and attract him.

The drawing-room was empty as Adelaide entered it, for it yet wanted some time to the hour of dinner. She stept out into the verandah. Long Jack was arranging the seats and mats there. As she appeared, the bracelet that had already been lost once fell from her wrist. It was a broad gold band, and it rolled away close to the feet of Long Jack stooping over his work.

Adelaide never now found herself in the negro's presence without her very blood curdling with aversion and even terror. But she had an object in view, and she was not one to shrink from a sacrifice or an effort. Jack continued smoothing the mat before him as if he neither saw nor heard the fallen bracelet. Adelaide felt a good opportunity had come, and mastering her repugnance, she said, in the low,

deep voice she knew so well how to modulate,

"Jack, will you not pick up my bracelet for me, and give it me?"

Jack looked up from his work, and a broad grin suffused his whole face. He took up the bracelet, his glittering eyes still fixed on Adelaide, but did not move. She stood on the step leading from the window to the verandah, about six paces from him. She stretched out her arm towards him and said,

"There is something amiss with the clasp. I cannot fasten it myself. Put it on for me."

She said it quite naturally, and just as when, a child of three years old, she used to kick off her little pink and blue shoes on account of the heat, and then summon Long Jack to replace them. The negro rose from his work and approached her. He bent down on one knee, clasped the bracelet round her wrist, and then, still kneeling, said,

"Missy lost that bracelet once before."

He rose as she answered him.

"Yes, Jack, I did lose it; and you tried to make mischief about it, and to injure me with my father and others. When I was a child, Jack, you carried me in your arms and cared for me. Now that I am a woman and unhappy, you are my enemy."

Jack looked down on the ground, his head a little on one side, and said quietly, but with conviction,

"Missy doesn't love Long Jack!"

It was always difficult for Adelaide not to speak the truth when appealed to, but she replied,

"You cannot say, Jack, that I have ever done anything to injure you, while you have done and said all you could to hurt me. Why is it?"

"No, no, Jack is only a poor servant, he cannot hurt proud, beautiful Missy."

"But you *have* hurt me, Jack, and you could do it again. Jack, you love my father; you ought to love my father's child!"

"Jack can't love in two different ways. Massa wants one thing—Missy wants another. Jack cannot serve both."

There was reason in this, and it was difficult to meet.

"You have nothing to do, Jack, with any differences you may fancy exist between me and my father. Even if they do exist, it can be no reason why you should be my enemy. Come now, Jack, remember the days when I was your piccaninny, and let us be friends for the future."

The negro approached and knelt down before her; he took the hand on which he had just clasped the bracelet, and put it first to his forehead and then to his lips. Then, slowly rising, he stood, with his tall, gaunt figure bending towards her, and said,

"Missy speak—Jack obey."

At that moment the door of the room opened behind Adelaide. Jack could see who entered from where he stood; Adelaide could only hear

that some one was there. He glided out of her sight in a moment, and Adelaide heard Oliver Standing's greeting as he approached her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAIN IT RAINETH EVERY DAY.

ABOUT midnight the flood-gates of heaven were opened, and deluges of rain saturated the sultry earth. Nursie awoke out of her sleep, and remembered how acutely her darling would be disappointed. She crept out of her hammock noiselessly to where Adelaide lay, not sleeping, but tossing from side to side with feverish restlessness.

"Oh! Nursie, there's the rain! How provoking! What shall I do now? How are we to meet?"

"It is certain you cannot go out for a day or two just while the first fury lasts, because

everybody would wonder what could make Missy leave the house in the floods. But it is only, my darling, to wait a very little while, and then we can arrange another meeting."

Adelaide made no reply. She felt choked by the utter inability of any one to enter into her feelings. Even Nursie could not be made to perceive that in her mind it was Charles himself she was afraid of. She had lost the calm assurance of his undivided love; and, strange to say, she had lost it just after the moment when she had felt most secure. The brief quarrel at Mrs. Oswald's, which had seemed to end in bringing them closer together, had, she found, made the little rift in the lute which had marred its harmony for ever. Her conversation with Georgiana Oswald that evening had only increased her anxiety. Charles's wise sayings about prudence and patience had fallen cold and hard upon her heart; and perhaps there was something in her friend's tone which had added to the impression—at least, she had said nothing to diminish it. Her quick perception

had also detected a sort of silent good understanding between her friend and her father, which she did not think justified by circumstances; and at that moment she was predisposed to see an enemy lurking in every imaginable ambush. There was a sort of little by-play, hardly to be expressed in words, which made her feel that she was distanced by Mrs. Oswald in her father's confidence.

While the evening lasted she had, partly from pique, and partly because under the pretence that being fully occupied herself she could better watch the others, thrown herself eagerly into conversation with Mr. Standing. She bantered him in a lively way; she talked to him in low tones, while, with bent head, under her long eyelashes she observed her father and his companion. She sang to him; but over the leaves of her music-book she could discern them in constant close conversation.

Mrs. Oswald had prognosticated the coming storm, and had insisted on going home early. Oliver Standing had lingered a little longer,

and then Adelalde's spirits had flagged. The occupation of watching and the excitement of conjecturing were over, and her attention was weary. Oliver, who himself felt his heart sinking somewhere into the region of his boots as the moment came for saying farewell, misinterpreted her absent manner, and half-flattered himself it arose from a kindred feeling. Thus are we always playing at cross questions and crooked answers with each other in the dumb show of daily life.

Mr. Snowden alone kept up his spirits to the last. He had been pleasant and genial all the evening, like a man whose conscience is at ease, who is sure of himself and sees good luck in the horizon. No wonder when Adelaide retired to rest, and with the coming rain loosening all her nervous system, she had been unable to close her eyes.

Not so Mrs. Oswald. She had come away more than ever certain of her influence over Mr. Snowden, but with a little feeling of growing hardness towards Adelaide. She said

to herself that Adelaide was really absurd—worse than absurd—with her petulance and impatience. What could there be such a hurry about? How could a few months, more or less, in the date of her marriage with Charles Falkener, be a matter of such enormous importance that she was to fret and fume in that way, and seem to lay aside all maidenly delicacy in her passionate hurry to see him, and to bring him round to her views? Mrs. Oswald was not an ill-natured woman, but she almost allowed herself to say in a whisper that Adelaide's impatience was really enough to compromise her reputation. What *could* it mean?

And yet no one might have known better than Mrs. Oswald what it meant. She was versed enough in women's wiles and in men's hearts to know that Adelaide's quick instincts had every cause to wake in alarm at the vague indistinct something that was growing up between herself and Charles Falkener. But Mrs. Oswald could not help that. She was too much in the habit of seeing every man sooner

or later nibble at her bait, and that without her angling for him, to stop and reflect upon whether or not there was danger now; and above all whether or not she could prevent it. No. It must take its chance, as it had done so often before. "She meant no harm."

The rain curtained in the day, and the house with its four walls, and the poor prisoner within. Adelaide could not go to the trysting-place, nor, in the first violence of the storm, did she dare excite attention by sending out Nursie with a letter. No letter, no token, found its way to her dungeon.

Charles was perfectly and philosophically satisfied that it was not a day to turn a dog out of doors, or even a negro less than a dog. The cause so well explained the result that it gave him no uneasiness, and he would have been simply surprised and disturbed could he have known that his beautiful captive was eating out her heart with impatience. Had he supposed it, he would have drawn a longer whiff from his cigar, and wondered a little at

the petulance of women. Nevertheless, he thought he should like to hear about her and know what had passed the previous evening; and as it was only a step he found means to rush through the torrents to Mrs. Oswald's door, and present himself before its slightly astonished mistress. Once there, the rain seemed to both of them to become more relentless and more difficult to face; and so he lingered on hour after hour. Mrs. Oswald played to him; she permitted a cigarette in her music-room, though not a "rat's-tail;" and Charles lay back dreaming in the very arm-chair Adelaide had occupied when she gave him that upward look which had so melted him the last time they had met there. But he did not dream of Adelaide, and he did not recognise the chair or recall the circumstance. Nevertheless, he was still in love with her, *suo modo*, and was not yet in love with anyone else.

The rain was exceptionally violent for an entire week; and Adelaide had a sharp feverish attack, which made it doubly impossible she

should run any risks. She wrote to him more than once; and eager to put to profit her reconciliation with Long Jack, she entrusted her letters to him. He brought no answer the first time, as Mr. Falkener was out. The second time he traced him to the Wren's Nest, and from thence conveyed a reply to Adelaide. Charles's letters were fond and kind, full of exhortations to patience, and a little quizzing Adelaide on her insubordination to current events. He made no allusion to the place where her letter had found him; and Adelaide would never have known it if Long Jack had not taken the trouble to inform her. Immediately her suspicions were excited that he was there also when Jack had not brought back an answer to her first missive. It was true Charles had sent a messenger of his own when, on his return home, he found her letter, but he made no allusion as to where he had been.

Meanwhile, as in this world we are seldom allowed to keep even our sorrows to ourselves, others were beginning to intermeddle with Ade-

laide's affairs, and bring their quota of gossip and mischief-making.

There was one house in the neighbourhood where the inmates seemed to have reached a sort of dead level of existence from which they neither rose nor sank; and that was the house of the Johnstones. Sarah's features grew, perhaps, a little more pointed as time went on, and her temper did not improve, which was the least unkind thing that could be said of it. She ruled her mother with rather more asperity than before, and was fast maturing into a thorough specimen of a strong-minded woman, with a well-developed capacity for business in the hard bargain line. There was only one point in which Mrs. Johnstone had ever succeeded in having her own way, and that, as we have already seen, had reference to renewed intercourse with Adelaide.

There was a touch of romance in good old Mrs. Johnstone's character, because she had a soft heart and a strong power of sympathy. She had failed to transmit these virtues to her

daughter; and the latter wanted that delicacy of perception which would have enabled her to appreciate her mother's sterling qualities, and which really threw into the shade her unquestionable vulgarity, and that peculiar wrong-headedness of thought and expression which proved her to belong (probably by natural selection) to the Mistresses Malaprop and Nickleby form of woman. If she could have been allowed to have her own way she might have been of real use to poor motherless Adelaide, and in all respects would have been a safer friend for her than the fascinating Mrs. Oswald. She had none of the narrowness of heart which would have made her shrink from seeing Adelaide the happy wife of another man because she had been the innocent occasion of Johnstone's being killed in a duel. She would have taken Adelaide to her bosom on any terms, from the mere memory of how poor Billy had loved her. More than once she had tried to elicit some sympathetic feeling from Sarah on this point, but she was always rebuffed by the

assertion that Adelaide Snowden was never likely to know her own mind long enough to marry at all; that she would probably go on flirting with every man she met—married men and all—until no honest man would care to make her his wife.

"And then if at last she did marry, she would fall to the lot of some mere fortune-hunter; and serve her right, too!"

"Lor! Sarah, I do think you are a trifle too hard on the girl—poor motherless lassie! I would give anything now to see her happy, if it were only for the sake of old times."

"Well, mother, perhaps you may have your wish one of these days. Now poor little Annie Falkener is in her grave there is nothing to prevent Mr. Falkener's marrying her. *She* at least did not wait till his wife was dead before she let him, and everyone else who had eyes in their head, see that she was after him. To be sure there are those who say poor Annie was really no obstacle at all to Mr. Falkener's taking a *wife* whenever he pleased."

"Sarah, how you do talk! There never was a word of truth in that slander."

"I did not say there was, and I don't believe there was, but whether or not, that's at an end, and Mr. Falkener is at liberty to make a fool of himself by marrying Miss Snowden whenever he pleases, and I suspect it can't be too soon to suit her."

"Why, Sarah, have you heard anything about it?"

"Yes, I have. And in fact, mother, that brings me to something I wanted to say to you. For some time past I have been meaning to tell you I really must have a maid who knows something more of what a young lady's maid should be than that stupid girl Sally. She has quite spoilt that last gown she had to alter for me—the blue silk, you know. And Penelope says there is more than enough work for her in the house, without her having to wait upon me. So I have made up my mind, mother, that I must look out for another maid. And I have ascertained that that clever, nice-looking girl Dinah,

whom Miss Snowden sent out of the house at a moment's warning, just in one of her tantrums, is still disengaged. I have sent for her this morning to speak to me. I expect her every hour, and I think I shall engage her immediately."

"Well, Sarah, you know you are as good as mistress here, and can take what servants you please. I never forget, my dear, that you are the heiress to all your poor father left, now your dear brother is gone. I have seen Dinah up at the Cedars. She is a smart-looking girl, rather too much so perhaps; but, however, I suppose you will be able to manage her. You can most people, I think. But for the life of me I can't see what this has to do with Mr. Falkener and Adelaide."

"Of course it has got nothing to do with them—I never said it had; only I have heard Dinah let drop things from time to time about her late mistress that showed me very well what is going on. And now there has been a quarrel between Mr. Falkener and Mr. Snowden, all

about the former having engaged Dinah's father, old Sam the carpenter; and it seems Miss Adelaide has never held up that proud head of hers since."

Then followed a great deal more to the same purpose; and Sarah let out that though Dinah was no longer living at the Cedars she knew pretty well what went on there, because she kept up intercourse with her former fellow-servants. One in particular, whom our readers will recognize as Long Jack. Evidently Sarah had not a soul above gossip; nor could it be said that even the more amiable Mrs. Johnstone was indifferent to those social crumbs of comfort which fall from our neighbour's tables, and entertain our sympathies and our antipathies through life.

The very next day Miss Dinah made her appearance as a member of Mrs. Johnstone's establishment. Her mother in vain suggested to Sarah that it would be at least advisable to see Adelaide first, and inquire why she had dismissed the girl. But Sarah scoffed at the

notion; *she* wanted no character of a girl she had known ever since she was born. The girl no doubt had been severely tried by Miss Snowden's imperious temper, and had perhaps given a sharper answer than her mistress chose to overlook. Indeed Dinah had given her to understand that was how it had happened, and for her part she was quite satisfied.

Old Mr. Neville dined that evening at Mrs. Johnstone's, and Sarah came down to dinner in white muslin and pink, with an elaborate arrangement of hair and chignon, in which even Mrs. Johnstone's maternal eye detected as faithful a copy of Adelaide's coiffure as the nature of the materials admitted of.

It must not be forgotten that Sarah was an heiress; and it is much to her credit that she had deeply deplored her poor brother's death in spite of the evident worldly advantage to herself. The younger men had long ago all fallen off from the track of Sarah's footsteps. But gentlemen of more advanced years might still be found who would be willing to take her as

the foil to many thousands of bright dollars. They would calculate that it is easier to manage a disagreeable wife than to raise the wind—and to many people money is of more moment than domestic bliss. It is not expensive to send your wife to Coventry.

Many days had elapsed, and besides the rain, which in itself would not have been sufficient to keep her away from him, Adelaide had been seriously unwell. Nursie and her father had found that it was not easy to minister to a mind diseased. But the latter had resolutely refused to see anything in her illness beyond the effects of a chill produced by the sudden change in the weather. Nursie knew better. But her hints and remonstrances had no other effect upon Mr. Snowden than to put him in a rage, and increase the danger that he might organize a closer system of espionage on all his daughter's actions. That had to be avoided at any cost, and Nursie was all the more alive to this that she did not quite share Adelaide's new-born and absolute trust in Long Jack. She would some-

times warn her darling that she sent him too frequently with letters and messages, and was not careful enough to choose convenient hours. Adelaide did not heed her. She had looked on Jack's animosity towards her as that of an animal she had failed to tame; but that now she had him under control, and that consequently his fidelity might be counted on like that of a dog. It did not however prevent her having the same feelings of real shrinking from the man that she might have had for some tame but repulsive member of the brute creation.

But then his apparent readiness to obey her behests, and the ingenuity with which he managed, no matter how engaged he might be, to slip away unobserved, and yet always be ready at his master's call, won a sort of gratitude from her. Besides, she believed implicitly in the man having an eye to his own interests, and she had condescended to remind him that when married to Mr. Falkener, she would be able to reward his services with a large present of money without at all compromis-

ing him in his master's eyes. Long Jack listened to these promises with a wide grin and a twinkle in his black eyes. He was never now otherwise than profoundly respectful towards her, and if he continued to indulge in impromptu songs she could not trace that it was at her expense.

The first day after her illness that Adelaide was sitting under the verandah, Jack had brought her a long and more than usually affectionate letter from Falkener, who had been very anxious about her all through her illness, and nothing would satisfy him but a daily bulletin from herself or Nursie, or at least from Long Jack. The inertia resulting from being ill had somewhat calmed and allayed the irritation of her feelings, and Falkener's kind words distilled in her heart like dew.

Jack lingered in the verandah, after arranging for her the chair and table, and her book and work, as though to tempt her to talk to him. She perceived this herself, and began by asking where he had found Mr. Falkener when

he had delivered her little note that morning.

"I beg Missy's pardon, but I think Missy may guess that from the letter being such a long one."

"Indeed, Jack, I can't."

"When Mr. Falkener is at home alone he has plenty of time on hand to write long letters, and Jack has to wait a good hour, and talk to the servants, and see Master George, and go into the stable to see Mr. Falkener's beautiful horses. But when Mr. Falkener is at Wren's Nest, oh! then it's sharp work for Jack —hardly time to drink a tiny glass—just a little line, write in great haste. 'Here, Jack, my man, there's half a dollar for you—carry that to your mistress.'"

"But I thought, Jack, you had only found Mr. Falkener once, perhaps twice, at Wren's Nest?"

"Oh! that is long ago, before Missy fall so ill. Now Mr. Falkener very dull. Missy in bed. Go up to Wren's Nest and talk all day with pretty Mrs. Oswald. Poor Mr. Falkener

want some one to comfort him. Mrs. Oswald so kind, so gentle. No wonder. Missy understands."

She did indeed understand! Every word was a dagger! She did not speak. She began calculating how many times Georgiana had been to see her during her illness. Why, she had hardly missed a day; and yet how little had she said of Falkener's visits! Sometimes, it would appear that she had seen him, but quite in a casual way and solely for the purpose of giving him information about Adelaide. In her accounts of their interviews, she effaced herself so entirely that she never appeared as anything but a mere medium, and all her individuality seemed gone. Was it, in fact, the very reverse of this? Was she charming away the exclusive affection of her friend's lover, and gradually attracting him to herself?

Adelaide's brain reeled at the thought. It grew and grew in her imagination with frightful rapidity; and Jack, who had stood watching her all the while that he pretended to be

putting things straight, suddenly disappeared and came back with a glass of cool water and lemon-juice, which he silently presented to her. She eagerly drank it off, and the cold liquid steadied her nerves and enabled her to recover herself. Jack gazed down on her pale face, and presently turned away abruptly, muttering something between his hard set teeth which sounded to Adelaide like an imprecation on Falkener and Georgiana both. Was she brought so low as to be pitied even by Long Jack? And yet even his sympathy was grateful to her—at least it proved that she might trust him, and make use of him to penetrate this mystery.

It had, of course, spread all over the neighbourhood that Adelaide had been ill; and as soon as she was sufficiently recovered to see people all were impatient to call. Even Sarah Johnstone showed an alacrity which had pleased her mother; and certain domestic cares having prevented her going herself on the day Sarah had proposed their first visit,

she had sent her a basket of fruit and a hundred kind messages through her daughter.

Sarah had arrived *en grande tenue.* She was taking kindly to her new character of the heiress of the Johnstones; and now that more than a year had elapsed since her brother's death, she showed forth her pretensions by wearing the gayest colours, and assuming a certain air of jauntiness very different from the demure aspect of her earlier years. After all, perhaps she had only wanted a little more power of self-assertion in her youth to have succeeded in being amiable. It was a real visit of state she was now paying Adelaide, with two black servants at the back of her carriage, and the horses and harness in the grandest style.

After the first greetings, and Sarah's expressions of pleasure at finding her dear friend so much better, Adelaide said,

"Why, Sarah, I hear you have taken Dinah as your maid."

"Yes, indeed, my dear. I found I could no longer do with a maid who was not exclusively

devoted to me. Sally, you know, occasionally lent a hand in the house-work, and that did not do. Besides, I wanted something more of a dressmaker; and I am happy to find Dinah makes very well."

As she spoke she re-arranged the furbelows of her handsome silk dress, and Adelaide's quick eye detected the exact pattern of the last gown Dinah had made for herself.

"But I wonder, Sarah, you did not come and ask me about the girl before you engaged her."

"Ah! well, my dear, you see you were ill at the time" (which, though true of the day when Dinah came, was not true of the time when Sarah resolved to take her), "and I did not like to trouble you. Besides, I had known Dinah as being in your family all my life, and I thought that was quite enough recommendation without inquiring further."

Adelaide thought to herself that was just the thing to throw suspicion on the fact of her

sudden dismissal; but she only smiled, and said—

"I hope you will like her. She is a very clever girl, and could make her way anywhere if she chooses. I think when she left me she thought she should get a situation with Mrs. Oswald."

"One can't wonder at that, with her father living in Mr. Falkener's employ, and he spending, as you may say, every day of his life with Mrs. Oswald."

"Why, Sarah, what do you mean? I don't suppose Mr. Falkener is more at Mrs. Oswald's house than is natural for such near neighbours."

"Then, my dear, that's because you know nothing about it. And no wonder. In the first place, you have been ill; and in the second, Mrs. Oswald is too sly by half to let all the world know how she goes on."

"Then how do you know it?" asked Adelaide, trying to control the tremor in her voice;

but she was weakened by her sickness, and she could not prevent the blood leaving her cheeks and even her lips.

"Well, my dear, I am not in the habit of listening to the gossip of servants, but I find Dinah a little irrepressible at times. You who know her will not be surprised at that. It seems that Sam has some work to finish in Mr. Falkener's house, and as he is there all day he gets to know pretty well what becomes of the master. When he goes home he talks about it all to Dinah, and I regret to say Dinah is very apt to repeat it to me while she is dressing my hair."

"And what does she repeat?"

"Oh! only that not a day passes without Mr. Falkener's going to Wren's Nest, early or late, and sometimes both. I should be sorry, my dear Adelaide, to say anything to give you pain; for of course, dear, all your friends know *you* were smitten in that quarter. But oh! my dear, do remember how much better it is you should know the truth, and how you ought to

thank Providence that I am sent to open your eyes."

"I don't thank Providence for anything of the kind, Sarah, and I don't believe Providence has anything to do with it. You thought to give me pain, and so you have repeated that idle girl's gossip, that's all."

"Ah! my dear, that's what comes of looking to second causes. What does it matter who is the channel, if only I am in time to open your eyes to the perfidy of that wicked young man, and the evil designs of that audacious flirt? When St. Paul spoke so beautifully of 'widows indeed,' what a different sort of person he must have had in his eye from Georgiana Oswald! I always thought her a bad friend for you, Adelaide; and now facts have proved it."

"I don't believe anything is proved, Sarah; and I *do* believe you are quite ill-natured enough to have forged the whole thing in your own imagination, for the sake of annoying me."

"You would not say that, Addy, if you were not already blinded by passion."

"Do you call it being blinded by passion because I stand up for the character of my friends? I deny that Mr. Falkener is perfidious, or that Mrs. Oswald is a flirt. I do not the least object to your saying that I care for Mr. Falkener. There is no reason why I should not do so, especially if he cares for me. Therefore, though I don't admire your delicacy in taxing me with it, yet I do not take it as an offence. But I cannot allow you to speak ill of those I love."

"Well, Adelaide, I did expect a little more feminine dignity in you than to hear you boldly acknowledge your love for a man who does not care for you one straw."

"And how do you know, Sarah, that Mr. Falkener is so indifferent to me? Are you in his confidence?"

"Nonsense, Adelaide! The man shows it fast enough, by the way he goes on with Mrs. Oswald. You had much better, my dear, show your good sense by thinking no more of it, and endeavour to make people forget the

lengths you have gone in your foolish conduct about him."

"Really, Sarah, this is too bad. I must insist on your saying to what you allude."

"No, my dear I shall not do so. I spare you any further allusion to meetings, and letters, and such like, going on incessantly, and at all hours, Adelaide. But you are young enough yet to make people forget your past imprudences, if only you will take the advice of one of your earliest and most faithful friends; for it is not everyone, let me tell you, Adelaide, who would take the trouble to call and give you good advice, and warn you against those who are deceiving you."

Adelaide was too angry to reply: The iron had entered into her soul, and she could only feel how sorry she was Sarah had thought it necessary to take any trouble of the kind. She longed to be rid of her. The sight of her sour face and gaudy colours affected her like a feverish dream. She was still weak from her illness, and she felt she could hardly control

her nerves, which were divided between the danger of bursting into tears and the desire to scratch Sarah's eyes out. Either course, or both, seemed equally natural and practicable at that moment; and she was not quite sure she should remain sufficiently mistress of herself to resist the temptation.

Sarah perceived she had done her worst, and it was not without some satisfaction that she surveyed the result of her eloquence, and read in Adelaide's exhausted and pallid face the havoc she had made in the poor invalid's peace of mind. Adelaide was at all times inclined to be rebellious at Sarah's way of interlarding her opinions by reference to sacred subjects, and mixing up the gospel with gossip, and the apostles with disagreeable advice and slander. She certainly had a trick of putting her piety to base purposes. Adelaide's training had not made her devout, but Sarah's cant inspired her with horror, and inclined her to be irreverent on subjects to which she seldom alluded, and if left to herself would never have spoken of disre-

spectfully. She used to say that the hypocrisy of others made an infidel of her; and unhappily the little she had seen of religious profession had generally been mixed up with falsehood, or, at the best, unamiable qualities.

Sarah did not return to the subject of Mr. Falkener and Mrs. Oswald. She had inserted the narrow end of the wedge, she had sown the little seed of discord, and she calmly and contentedly left it to work. On her return home she told her mother that she had performed a stern duty, and one to which she felt herself called by all the obligations of sincere friendship.

"I thought it right to do it, and I did it thoroughly. I did not mince matters, but told her the whole truth. I could not have done it otherwise than I did, for I felt it was a solemn occasion. I changed my dress on purpose, mother. I took the black carriage-horses and the two footmen; and I do hope I have made an impression on that poor deluded girl which she will remember for life. Who knows but

what it may be the saving of her—as I humbly and earnestly hope it may!"

And thus poor Mrs. Johnstone was disappointed in the comfortable chat she had expected to have on Sarah's return as to how Adelaide had looked, and what she wore, and all she said. She knew, when Sarah was once mounted on the stilts of stern duty, there was an end to all other facts, and it would be in vain to question her. She would have liked just to know how the black carriage-horses and the two footmen had added to the efficacy of her remonstrances, as it seemed improbable she should have taken them up into the drawing-room with her, and Adelaide most likely remained in ignorance that they were waiting below. On the whole, however, Mrs. Johnstone thought it better to leave this question in ethics unasked and unsolved.

CHAPTER V.

"To be wroth with one you love,
Doth work like madness in the brain."

SARAH had not long left the house, and Adelaide was still struggling with the mad anguish of the many stabs she had given her, when Long Jack entered the room in a stealthy way, and closing the door behind him came close up to where Adelaide sat before communicating to her, in a stage whisper, that Mrs. Oswald had called. Adelaide turned sharp round on him, and said with irritation,

"Why do you announce her in that mysterious way?"

Jack looked at her with a pathetic expression and replied,

"Ah! Missy—she's a bad woman to Missy! Missy mark poor Jack's words. Mrs. Oswald steal away Missy's sweetheart, suck him up with her quiet ways. Mr. Falkener always there. If Missy sees Mrs. Oswald, Missy have it out with her; tell her to her face, bad, false, quiet woman!"

"I mean to do so, Jack. But is it true, Jack?—is he always there?"

"Always, Missy—night and morning—mostly lives there. Sam tell Dinah, Dinah tell Jack."

Here was confirmation of Sarah's gossip stronger than any Adelaide had anticipated. She little guessed that Jack had been listening to all that passed between her and Sarah, concealed behind one of the grass blinds of the verandah, and that, though unable to hear every word, he had picked up enough to give him his cue, and confirm suspicions already excited in his own mind.

"Let Mrs. Oswald in, Jack. She will wonder we keep her waiting."

"No, no, Jack tell her Missy not quite

dressed. Wait five minutes. Jack wanted to put Missy on her guard."

For a moment, in the midst of so many other troubled thoughts, it crossed Adelaide's mind how from time to time Jack seemed to lapse into an exaggeration of his negro mode of talking, from which he was nearly free at other times. The fact was that Jack and Nursie, and, in short, all the servants who had lived in the family since their youth, were quite capable of talking much like other people. But in moments of excitement many of them lapsed into their own peculiar form of dialect; and Adelaide took it as an evidence of Jack's real devotion to her interests, and of the way in which his feelings were enlisted in her favour. She could not but remark to herself how adroitly he had given Mrs. Oswald a reason for delaying her entrance while he put her on her guard against her enemy.

Adelaide stood up to receive her friend—pale, rigid, and stern. Mrs. Oswald entered with a soft, swaying motion, peculiar to her

lithe figure, both hands extended to greet Adelaide, when, struck by her peculiar aspect, she suddenly paused, and the two women stood confronting each other. It seemed doubtful which would first break the silence. Mrs. Oswald advanced a step, and said gently,

"Adelaide, you are very ill."

Adelaide recoiled.

"Don't touch me, Georgiana; and don't speak to me of myself till you have heard all I have to say. Tell me, by all you hold sacred, is it true that Charles Falkener is with you every day?"

"My dear child, what does this mean? I might ask you what right you have to put such a question to me, and in that manner too; but I abstain. Mr. Falkener has been to call several times at my house—generally to inquire after you. Why do you ask?"

"I ask because the instincts of my own heart and everything around me tell me that *you*, Georgiana, whom I have trusted and loved as a young girl might do an older and more ex-

perienced woman, have deceived and betrayed me."

"Those are very strong expressions, Adelaide. By what right do you apply them to me?"

"By all the rights of an outraged affection and a half-broken heart. You, with your quiet, insinuating way, an adept in that art of which I, poor fool! with my honest love, know nothing, have tried, and are trying to cajole Charles away from me. I will not say that you have succeeded. It is long since I have seen him, and until I do see him I shall not know. The first glance will be enough, Georgiana. There is the truest divination in a love like mine. I need but to see Charles to know how false you have been, and how weak he is. My God! to think it should come to this, after all I have risked for him, after the true, undeviating love I have cherished for him alone! Why could you not leave him to me?" exclaimed the excited girl, turning on her silent adversary a look as if she could have stung

her—"my one ewe lamb, my one tender feeling in all this dark, degraded, unhappy home of mine! *You* might have had any other lover. Do you suppose I did not see with my own eyes the other night how you had enthralled even my own poor old father? They are all fish that come to your net. But I was so alone in the world. I had fixed my heart so entirely on the one manly, noble being that my narrow sphere had shown me; and you have not spared me even that one."

"Gently, gently, Adelaide."

"I will say my say, Georgiana, if after I break my heart and die—as would to God I could! Remember I don't blame Charles. He would have been true to me if you had let him. He may be weak; to think that I should live to hear myself say it! But he is honest. Honest? Did I say honest?"

She was now talking half dreamily to herself, as if she had forgotten she was not alone; and Mrs. Oswald watched her, terrified.

"Yet he deceived Annie—I think. That

child should never bear his name. But what is that to me? I loved him. To me he would have been honest."

Mrs. Oswald approached her, and laid her hand gently on her arm.

"Adelaide, dear Adelaide, you are not yourself; you ought not to be up and standing." And she tried to lead her to a chair.

But instantly Adelaide recovered from her brief distraction, and turning her large fiery dark eyes on Georgiana's face, she said with scorn in her voice,

"A woman like you is incapable of understanding what Charles is to me. And for that very reason you are doubly culpable to have stepped in between him and so great a love. If he cares for you, he has chosen the pebble rather than the pearl, and I ought to despise him. But I cannot; neither can I hate him. And it is you, Georgiana, on whom my heart invokes all the punishment due to your treachery."

"Indeed, Adelaide, this is nothing more nor

less than delirium. I cannot tell who has poisoned your mind against me. You are quite and entirely wrong. I have had nothing to do with winning away Mr. Falkener's affections from yourself, if, as you tell me, and which I was not aware of, they *are* estranged. For your own sake I think it is right to tell you that your impetuous temper is only too well calculated to make any sensible man reflect twice before he takes you to be his wife, and the mother of his children. You are too ungoverned not to make his life with you a stormy one. But I don't know why I should say this to you. I really have nothing whatever to do with it. I thought it right to befriend you so far as I could compatibly with the confidence reposed in me by your father, but for the future I shall abstain from having anything to do with your sentiments towards Mr. Falkener, or his for you. Let it be a sealed subject between us. You have made it the occasion of a most painful scene, and one I should resent from any one but yourself. I put a great deal of it down

to your inexperience of life; and more still to your being out of health. I must say one thing before I leave, and that is, I am greatly shocked at the way you have spoken of the late Mrs. Falkener, and of that dear child. I could not have believed that, with any respect for Mr. Falkener, you could have done so."

"Georgiana," exclaimed Adelaide, in a passion of anger, "how dare you speak to me thus, when you know very well that it was yourself who first told me Annie was not married to Charles, and that everybody said so? I own I had had doubts before, but it is only now that I have believed it to be certain. And so do *you;* and yet you pretend to be so fond of that unhappy baby, only, I am convinced, to throw into stronger light before Charles my indifference about him. But I waste words on you. You are as incapable of understanding me as I am of talking in your measured phrases, and training my feelings like clock-work. Remember, however, one thing, Georgiana Oswald, as you turn again to your smooth life and

easy sympathies—incapable as you are of understanding a passion like mine, the Nemesis of my outraged affections will follow you to the very verge of the grave, and beyond it, unless you give me back my lover, and leave him to me alone.—Oh! Charles, Charles! to think that I should have to call your faith in question, and in consequence of her!"

She turned away, and hid her face in her hands. Georgiana Oswald looked shocked and distressed rather than angry. There certainly was nothing of the old Greek afflatus like that of the half-pagan girl before her, in any of Mrs. Oswald's most powerful sentiments. She had never met with the human being, as she never would meet with the moral cause, that could fire her with such enthusiasm as to leave the world a blank, and life an impossibility without them. She went up to Adelaide and laid her hand gently on her shoulder.

"Adelaide, I will say nothing in answer to your violent accusations and untempered lan-

guage. In a few days you will, I hope, be better in health, and then, if you have not forgotten all you have said, you will, at least, have repented of it. God bless you! I shall not call again till you send for me, or till you come to me."

She stole a kiss on Adelaide's half-concealed cheek, and glided out of the room. A shudder ran through Adelaide's frame as Mrs. Oswald's lips touched her. She made no reply, and she stood long in the same attitude without speech or movement. When at length she withdrew her hands from her face, her eyes were quite dim, and a look of settled despair was on her countenance that would have struck the most casual observer. She sank down in the chair from which she had risen when Mrs. Oswald entered. How long she remained there she did not know, neither could she exactly have told what she had been thinking of. She remembered noticing a bright-winged insect that advanced along the matting towards her, and

wondering whether it would come near enough to touch her. She watched the atoms dancing in a sunbeam that crept through a hole in the blind, and she saw the sunbeam decline gradually and grow paler. The atoms seemed to die out of it; their ranks grew thinner; those that were still apparent danced on to the end. Then the sun sank, and all the atoms disappeared. Still she sat on, with a half-stupid feeling of curiosity as to what would happen next.

But daily life seldom brings a prolonged series of catastrophes. Hearts may break, friends may quarrel and part, the dead may lie in their silent state or be carried away to the more silent grave; but the dinner-bell will ring through it all, and cynics will still call it the tocsin of the soul. We talk of the monotony of life, and yet nothing can exceed its daily, hourly shocks; only we are so used to them that we maintain a decorous demeanour throughout. The letter-bag comes in, and one letter gives you a stab from a far-distant hand,

by the jarring of its cold indifference with your own yearning thoughts; perhaps an absent child, who cares little for the old nest, or the poor mother's heart that warmed it. You tear open another, and that small sum of money that was so much wanted, which you had counted over a hundred times and tried a hundred times to spread over a bulk six-fold as large as its own, does not come to you, and goes into some already plethoric purse. The little visit you had set your heart on, the guest who would have shed one honied drop of sweetness on the dry bread of your daily life, cannot come; and so on, and so on. You gather up the sheaf of your ill-luck for that one day, and with a seemingly placid brow and a tight feeling round your heart, you turn to your household or your desk, your study or your farm; and through it all the breakfast and the dinner, the morning and the evening are the first day, and on to the seventh again and again, through all the three-score years and ten.

Sometimes there is a golden harvest, or an earthquake, in a lifetime. In the first instance your enemies are envious—hardly less so your friends. In the second case your friends display their rhetoric in essays on resignation, and your enemies fling up their caps and cry hurrah. Both had always prophesied the misfortune would befall you, if, in any way the most remote, your own finger may have touched the spring that produced the catastrophe.

But these are the exceptions, the comets and eclipses of the individual life. For the most part it is a long series of slight daily shocks, like the movements of some spontaneous and irrepressible galvanic battery; and through them rings that breakfast and dinner-bell, and comes that everlasting opening and closing of shutters.

As we write these lines we hear the sharp voice of the critic or the moralist, bidding us remember that those morning and evening bells, of whose monotony we seem to speak complainingly, are in themselves huge blessings. Many

are without their reassuring regularity. True, friend! But then they are also without so large and so active a galvanic battery. They carry the dull ache of life in their hearts—as who does not?—but they hear fewer of the sharp treble notes that accompany that deep-sounding bass, in the solemn and pathetic dirge which we call life.

Adelaide was not yet considered strong enough to pass frequently from room to room, and therefore, when she was roused from her long collapse, it was to see Jack enter with the preparations for dinner. Mr. Snowden, thinking his daughter very much better, had gone for a few days to a distant part of his property. And thus she was to dine alone. Jack was struck with the peculiar alteration in her countenance; he had been able to secure the same sort of intelligence as to the exact nature of her interview with Mrs. Oswald which he had already done as regarded Sarah's visit. He was, therefore, not surprised at her dejection, though at the same

time he thought there was a look of utter depression that exceeded at least, to his mind, any perceptible cause.

"Shiver my shins if Dinah would take on for me like that!" he muttered to himself, as he displayed the spoons and forks on a side-table. "I had rather have a box on the ears, or even a scratch on my cheek, than meet such a face as that in my sweetheart. By Jingo! she'd be up to murder any day, and I wouldn't be altogether against helping her, if I saw my way how to do it so as to please *me!*"

He served her to soup; he cut the daintiest little bits to put on her plate; and when he saw how little she tasted, he placed himself behind her chair, and whispered in her ear, with the familiarity of an old servant to a child,

"Missy keep up a good heart. Missy has forgotten that Jack was to go this evening down yonder to fetch a letter. Missy amuse herself with eating just a little fruit, and Jack go quick as thought and bring a beautiful long letter."

"Go, Jack," she said, faintly and gently, and let him pile her plate with ripe fruit, and put the wine near her, while, clearing all else away, he noiselessly departed.

Presently Nursie came in, and was struck also with Adelaide's peculiar expression. It was as if all the light of her face were drawn inward, and her eyes burnt with a lurid flame in the deep cavern of their sockets. She looked unearthly, and Nursie was appalled. She tried to make her talk, but it was in vain; she tried the coaxing, caressing ways she had been in the habit of using with her since she had nursed her, an infant, in her arms. Adelaide submitted with a sort of tender grace, but made very little response. At length she left her, puzzled and vaguely alarmed.

In about an hour's time Long Jack returned and brought her the expected letter. She turned it round and round in her hand abstractedly, as people do who are guessing at an unknown correspondent; but she did not open it till Jack had left the room. It was a long let-

ter from Charles Falkener, and a kind one; but still it jarred upon Adelaide's excited nerves. He told her what he had been doing, descanting easily on his daily avocations. He dwelt affectionately on the sad hindrances which prevented their meeting, and especially on her illness; he mentioned little George "squalling up in the nursery as I am writing to you." And it ended thus—"Good night, dearest. I shall be sitting here far into the small hours of the morning, looking over a heap of accounts, and sorting a world of papers, while you, I hope, will be getting that refreshing sleep which is soon to restore you to health."

She knew well where that "here" meant—it was his arm-chair in his large study, opening out upon the garden. It was there she had gone to him the afternoon of Annie's funeral; it was there she had wiled him out of his remorseful grief, and substituted so entirely her own image for that of his dead and still unburied wife. Suddenly she started up and exclaimed aloud,

"He is there, and alone! I will go to him. I will see him again. I *will know*, though I die for it!"

She looked magnificent in the wild frenzy of her passion, crushing the letter in her hand as she hid it in her bosom. In a moment all the remaining weakness of her illness seemed to have left her. She poured out a large glass of wine, and drank it at one draught. She flew to the door and locked it, so as to prevent any one immediately detecting her flight; then, snatching up a large shawl which lay near, she wrapt it closely around her, covering her head with its folds. She passed out into the verandah, and closed the window behind her; she looked cautiously around, to see that no one watched her, and then bounded off like a deer, leaping rather than walking from terrace to terrace, until she found herself in the close covert of the wood. Even then, though the tangled grass, laden with moisture, compelled her to slacken her pace, yet she never paused; and pushing her way through the boughs that

shook little showers on her head as she touched them, she continued her unbroken course with the steadiness and fearless rapidity of a somnambulist.

It was not till she came to the edge of the lawn in front of Wren's Nest that she drew breath. That smooth lawn seemed the only obstacle that checked her course. She shuddered as she approached the little gate where she had lost her bracelet—that beginning of all her troubles. She stood trembling on the edge of the close-cut lawn as though it were a turbid river she had to cross. She could perceive lights in Mrs. Oswald's house. At last, summoning up all her courage, she dashed along in front of those cruel windows, with the unfriendly light straight across her path, and reached the entrance to Falkener's garden and the deep sheltering shadow of a group of magnificent pimento trees. Here she paused to recover breath, and to rearrange her shawl. She turned her steps in the direction of Falkener's study window, and beheld with a sense of re-

lief the light of his lamp streaming out into the darkness beyond.

She noiselessly crept up to the window, and while she stood in shadow she could see the whole interior of the room, and Falkener sitting at some distance with his back to the window, in that well-known arm-chair, his head bent over a pile of papers that lay on his business-table before him. She clasped her hands at sight of him, and peered from the darkness into the light.

From time to time he moved his head, looking for some documents to the right or left, and then she could catch the delicate Greek outline of his handsome profile. In the ardour of his labours he would sometimes pass that well-known and beloved hand through the clustering waves of his rich auburn hair. Yes, he was very beautiful; as nearly perfect in face and form as it is given to mortals to be. And once, not long ago, that had been all her own to love, and be loved by. And now!

She could bear it no longer; and her damp

garments clinging round her saturated feet, were making her feel cold; and conscious of her abnormal position she tapped softly at the window.

Charles started a little, and looked round the room. But perceiving nothing, he dipt his pen into the ink, and proceeded to make annotations on the paper before him. Again she knocked. He looked up sharply at the door and called "Come in." Finding no one entered, he rose, went to the door, and opened it. As he walked back to his seat he faced the window where Adelaide stood. He stopt dead short as he caught sight of her dark figure in the gloom of a moonless, starless night. He threw up his hands with a gesture of astonishment, which she thought savoured of impatience and annoyance. He opened the window, and Adelaide stept in.

"You are not glad to see me, Charles," she said, in a low timid voice, looking up at him out of her lustrous eyes, and with cheeks as pale as ashes.

"Good Heavens, Adelaide, what madness is this! How can I be glad to see you coming to me in this plight?—ill as you are, and at this time of night. What has happened?—for God's sake, speak at once."

"I could not bear it any longer, Charles, and I came to see for myself."

For a moment he really thought the fever had touched her brain, and that she was delirious. He did not answer her, but took her hand, felt her wet clothes, and with a gesture of distress and vexation led her to a sofa. Then, kneeling before her, he began drawing off her saturated slippers, and entreating her to do the same with her stockings. She obeyed in silence. He remembered suddenly the little white feet he had seen gleaming on the grass that midnight under the catalpa tree, and a feeling akin to pity, such as one might have for a beautiful and wayward child, struggled in his heart. Nevertheless it did not make him really more loving towards her. He felt all the provokingness of her rash conduct. What

was he to do with her at that hour of the night, coming in upon him ill and wet? As he wiped her feet in his handkerchief, she sitting silent, and helplessly letting him do it as though she had no power of resistance, he exclaimed,

"Good gracious, Adelaide, how am I to get you home?"

"I am hardly come, Charles, and already you talk of sending me away."

"But you must be mad, Adelaide, not to understand the awkwardness of the position, so compromising to you. What if my servants see you here?"

"You have only to lock the door, and then they cannot come in."

He looked at her with surprise. For a moment he was awed into respect by the candid innocence of her unsuspicious and trusting nature. Hardly even a bad man could have laid a finger on her as she sat there so white, so woebegone, so utterly unconscious of anything but her great despairing grief. Charles was far from being a bad man, though he was equally

far from being a thoroughly good or noble one. She tucked her little feet under her, as she had done with such quiet dignity at that meeting to which we have already referred, and sat huddled up, her shawl having fallen from her head and neck, and her eyes silently raised to Charles's disturbed face as he stood before her.

"And now, Adelaide, collect your thoughts" (for he honestly believed her mind was wandering), "and tell me why you are here."

"I thought we were to meet, Charles. I have waited so long, I could not wait any longer. Tell me, Charles, have you ceased to love me?"

"Nonsense, Adelaide! Was it worth while to risk your reputation, to put me into such a devil of a fix, and to endanger your life, just for the sake of asking me that question four and twenty hours earlier?"

"It was life or death to me, Charles, to know it at once. But you are right. I need not have come. You *are* changed. I knew I should

only have to see you once to make sure of it. I have seen; and I know it now. That other woman has passed like a shadow between you and me, and the future will never be like the past."

"Then it is to some ridiculous and childish jealousy that I owe the honour of your very ill-timed visit this evening?"

The blood rushed to Adelaide's brow at these stinging words; she gasped a moment for breath, and clutched her right hand above her heart, like a person who feels a sudden pain. When she could command her voice to speak she did so with dignity, and said,

"Yes, I am jealous. I am jealous of Georgiana Oswald. I know you see her daily, or nearly so; therefore it is needless to deny it—if you would stoop to a lie, which I don't yet believe you would. Charles Falkener, I am wild, passionate, headstrong, and exacting. I see it all. I understand it. Georgiana is a soft, gentle, domestic woman. I have wearied you with my absorbing love. You prefer the easy con-

quest of her all but pulseless heart, and I am forgotten."

"All this is very heroic, Adelaide; and you have admirably described your own faults, though I think you have hardly done justice to your friend's virtues. But I don't quite see the point of your discourse. What is it you want me to do, and what do you expect me to say?"

"I might have expected you to deny the infidelity to me of which I accuse you; but you don't seem able to do that, or at least you are unwilling. I ask you for no words or expressions of affection; but you might still by your actions set my heart at rest, and leave me to believe I am not the miserable fool I now think myself for loving you as I do."

"I don't see daylight yet, Adelaide. What is it you want me to do?"

She paused before answering him. She raised herself a little from her stooping posture, and took his hand as he stood before her, clasping it in both of hers.

"I am going to ask you to do that which it breaks my heart to say, but which alone can restore my peace of mind, or at least leave me time to recover myself, and to trust you again. Your father has long wished you to return to England, and, partly on my account, you have refused. It still wants one month to the year of mourning for Annie, before the expiration of which period you have always said you would not marry me. Lately you have added that you wish to wait longer, in the hope of first securing my father's entire approbation—a hope, Charles, I have never shared with you. I ask you, Charles, my own beloved one, to go away. Return to England, wait there the time you must wait, then come and fetch me; or, at your bidding, I would take Nursie and join you."

"Really, Adelaide, your waywardness and caprice exceed all imagination. You violently opposed my rejoining my father at the time he so pressed it, and that I was inclined to go; and now, when I have embarked in new enter-

prises which require my constant attendance, and will do for many months to come, you suddenly come rushing over here in the night to desire me to leave the country. I cannot possibly do it."

He had drawn his hand away from hers as he began his sentence, and he stood before her cold and unmoved by any sentiment save irritation and palpable vexation.

"Do you positively refuse my request, Charles, though I ask it by all the memory of our past love?"

"Do you want to drive me into a corner, Adelaide, or to pick a quarrel with me? If you do, you certainly have chosen the best way to set about it."

"If that is your sole reply, Charles, I am more than answered," and she rose as she spoke.

"Indeed, Adelaide, nothing can be further from my wish than to give you pain. This disagreeable interview has been entirely of your own seeking. You come here taunting

me with your absurd jealousy, because you have chosen to quarrel with a person whom you always represented to me as your dearest friend, and whose acquaintance I sought for your sake; and then you expect me suddenly to throw up everything, and rush back to my father, who has given up expecting me, and who would be greatly annoyed at my neglecting the care of his property here at such a moment. Come, Addy, be reasonable, and give it up."

"Oh! Charles, if you loved me you would go!"

"Well, that is the most extraordinary version to give of the matter I ever heard of. Most people wish to keep those they love near them."

She leant forward, till her head rested on its old home near his heart.

"But I know, Charles, that you are in danger from that woman's wiles, and that, if you stop, I shall be robbed of you by her."

"Adelaide, my word is pledged to you.

Do you believe me capable of deceiving you?"

She lifted her head, and looked at him proudly.

"Charles, I would never marry you because you gave me your word. I would never be your wife if you loved me less, and another woman more."

"There you are again, Adelaide, always going off into your high-flown notions. You certainly might learn a little more of the plain common-sense of daily life by your frequent intercourse with your former friend, whom you now designate as a pulseless woman."

His sarcastic tone stung her to the quick, and she stepped back from him a pace. Her only reply was—

"Charles, I conjure you to leave Jamaica. I implore you, by all you hold sacred, go away for a time. I do not ask you to take me with you—I could not ask it in the state of mind in which I find you. But go alone,

and let me join you hereafter, if circumstances prevent your fetching me. Oh! Charles, Charles, if you love me, go! I have no peace so long as you are here. I shall go mad if I have to suffer again all I have gone through lately."

"There would be no suffering at all if you were only a reasonable woman, instead of the ungovernable girl you are, Adelaide. You make your own miseries, and then expect me to sacrifice myself to satisfy your caprice. I tell you again, Adelaide, I cannot and I will not leave Jamaica at the present moment. And I deny that you have the right to ask me."

Adelaide shuddered, and turned from him as if he had struck her. At the same moment they heard the sound of feet outside. Charles turned to the window. Adelaide uttered a low cry, and sank back on the sofa in a dead faint. The window was opened, and in rushed Nursie and Long Jack. The former was nearly beside herself with grief and terror. She flung herself on Adelaide, and caught her in her arms.

Charles exclaimed, "Thank God, you are come!" Long Jack stood back in the shadow, and looked on with a cynical smile.

CHAPTER VI.

ONLY NATURAL.

THEY carried her home in a litter, which Falkener got into the room without calling in the aid of his household, and so letting it be known that Adelaide was there. She was a long time before she came to herself, and when she did she let them place her in the litter without making any remark. She did not speak to Charles, but her eyes never for one moment ceased to gaze on him. He felt them going through him. What did that long, steady, fixed gaze mean? He helped to carry the litter, standing behind her while Jack took the other end. Even so she had turned her head aside, in such a way that her eyes

could be still fixed on his hand and figure. Nursie walked by her side. They were to carry her in by the verandah and the drawing-room, so as not to disturb the household. Nursie had missed her very shortly after she made her escape, when she had come into the room to inquire after her and to urge her retiring early to rest. Not finding her there she had looked for her in her bedroom, in the study, in her father's room—in short, everywhere. Some sudden instinct of prudence (for Nursie had for a long time past been living a cautious, silent life on Adelaide's account) prevented her asking any of the servants about her until she had found Long Jack. Then they searched the house and the garden together. Nursie had proposed going to Wren's Nest; but Jack gave her to understand that was a most unlikely place in which to find her. Nursie knew something of Adelaide's jealousy, and both decided they would go to Mr. Falkener's house before they made any inquiries at Mrs. Oswald's.

When they got her home, and she was safely laid on the sofa, Charles leant over her and bade her farewell, kissing her affectionately. A long, shuddering sob passed through her whole frame as he did so. Her large eyes were fixed on his, but her lips never unclosed with a single word. He thought she was probably feeling very weak and ill, and with many recommendations to Nursie to let him hear about her the first thing in the morning, he left the house.

As he passed across the lawn of Wren's Nest, he thought he saw a light moving in Mrs. Oswald's room. How he longed to go in there and tell her all, and talk it over, and hear what her calm good sense would say. But that was impossible. He must wait till morning, and meanwhile he went weary to bed, giving up all further attempt at setting his papers to rights for that night. It had been hard work helping to carry the litter through the wood. It always took four men—they had been only two. To be sure both of them were unusually strong men; Falkener because he was so well knit and

so admirably proportioned; Long Jack because he was a specimen of true brute force. Now that it had ended so well, he was not very much troubled about Adelaide's visit.

"She would soon give up her sudden notion of sending him off to England," said he to himself. "No doubt her illness had made her a little light-headed. Nevertheless there was a terrible deal of truth in what she said of herself and Mrs. Oswald. The latter was the proper stuff for a wife, and a step-mother for that poor little chap next door. She is not to be compared in beauty with Adelaide, though there is something marvellously fascinating about her. But then there are none of those ups and downs in her temper, which are all very well while you are making love, but become a bore when carried so far as Adelaide carries them. Poor dear girl! it has been all her vile education with that Portuguese mother, and that scoundrel of an attorney father. One could not well expect anything else. But when she is my wife it will

be different. That sort of thing would never do in England, and especially in my father's house."

And so he prosed on to himself till sleep descended on his last thought of what a relief it would be to talk it well over with Mrs. Oswald the next day.

That moving light in Mrs. Oswald's house had meant all that it could mean. She had seen Adelaide dash wildly across her lawn on her way to Falkener's house. Enveloped as she was she could not be quite sure it was she, and not rather one of the servants, only she knew no one but Adelaide who could run so lightly and so swiftly. There was no doubt left in her mind when she saw the party emerge with the litter, Mr. Falkener himself helping to carry it. What could have happened? Had Adelaide gone suddenly mad? Or had she, in her sober senses, been so lost to all decency and decorum as to go alone, at that hour, to see Mr. Falkener? She had already had her suspicions as to the real tenor of Adelaide's conduct, but this confirmed them.

She was predisposed to put the worst interpretation on anything she did, by the disagreeable and galling things Adelaide had said to herself that very day. She sat up half the night ruminating on what she had seen, and on the infinitely more which she surmised. She half hoped Mr. Falkener would have seen the light in her room on his way back, and would violate all the laws of propriety by tarrying at her window and satisfying her devouring curiosity. For, after all, the sort of thing which would be extremely wrong for Adelaide to do was of no consequence with herself, so long as it did not become public and lead to gossip. She felt quite sure the morning would bring her friend—full of his troubles; for of course it *was* trouble.

And the morning did bring him.

When he woke he found himself not quite so reassured and tranquil about what had happened as he had persuaded himself the night before. Was it the yoke of matrimony that was uneasily fitting itself round his neck in the way

Adelaide seemed to think she had a prescriptive right to say, "Go to England, far away from Mrs. Oswald?" And then, too, her want of prudence was shocking. Not that for a moment he attributed an improper feeling to Adelaide. He was far more capable than Mrs. Oswald of understanding the dignity of Adelaide's passion. Mrs. Oswald could as little appreciate its dignity as its intensity.

Still he thought how awkward it would prove hereafter if Adelaide always remained as superbly untrammeled by the ordinary rules of life as she was now. It did all very well for Jamaica, and was adapted to the style of life there: doors that seldom shut, windows always open, sleeping in a hammock slung on the bough of a tree, turning night into day when the day was too hot for anything but sleep. Even the loose thin clothing had a *laisser-aller* in it which would not do in a European drawing-room.

It had had a great charm for him out there, but he was beginning to feel shy about trans-

porting it straight to Moreton Moat. And when he remembered the old oak paneling, the tapestried walls, the heavy furniture, and the stately servants in powder and liveries, as compared with houses of bamboo, and sauntering, slouching, familiar negroes, he trembled at the idea of carrying a girl brought up exclusively in the latter straight into one of the stiffest specimens of the former.

And yet he said to himself that Adelaide's beauty must triumph everywhere. Unfortunately beauty alone is not enough. It was true Adelaide was original and very clever. She could be brilliant in conversation when the mood took her. But then she had not half the pliability, the constant flow of give and take, the facility of adapting herself equally well to everybody, which distinguished Mrs. Oswald. If Adelaide did not like her company she would sit like the Sphinx, as grand and as silent. Mrs. Oswald could chirp on most agreeably, no matter to whom or on what subject. And that sort of thing was

better adapted to England and to Moreton Moat, and to the society of the present Honourable Mrs. Falkener, his step-mother.

When he reached Mrs. Oswald's house—his hands thrust deep into his pockets, as a man does when he is thinking hard—he had got a care-worn look about him which had grown since the day before. She saw it well enough as she watched him cross the lawn and walk round to the door of the house. She had been up early, and waiting for him the last hour. As he entered the room, and flung down his hat like a man come for a long time, she exclaimed,

"Oh! Mr. Falkener, what has happened?"

"Why?" he asked, startled at the apt question, "what do you know about it?"

"I saw Adelaide, at least what I thought was her, rush across last night. Then you passed with Long Jack carrying her home. I have had no sleep all night. A thousand horrors have filled my mind. I thought at

last she must have gone raving mad, and made her escape."

He told her all, except Adelaide's reason for wishing him to leave Jamaica. Mrs. Oswald knew, but of course she could not let that out; and with every appearance of surprise, she inquired what could be Adelaide's motive.

Charles looked at her fixedly, but did not answer immediately.

"Cannot you guess her reason?"

A faint consciousness passed over her countenance, and she looked down.

"Yes, I see you understand; Adelaide is jealous of you."

"She has no cause, Mr. Falkener," replied Mrs. Oswald in a very low voice.

"I am not so sure of that," said Charles, and getting hastily up he walked away to the window. There was a pause, awkward to both; then suddenly he turned and confronted her.

"*Cannot* you help me, Mrs. Oswald? I am in a great strait."

"You must tell me what is your strait before I can possibly hazard my advice."

"That's just what it is so awfully difficult to do. You see I have loved Adelaide with all my heart. She is a splendid creature. Any man might be proud of her. But she is a little too much for me. Her temper is uncertain. She is very *exigeante*, and I sometimes ask myself almost in despair how far she is fitted for European life, and to be little George's mother; and altogether how she would settle down into an English home."

"Do you remember, Mr. Falkener, my saying much the same thing to you many months ago?"

"I do. But I did not see it then. My eyes are opened now. Last night did a great deal to make me reflect. And in short, the fact is I am the most miserable man alive."

"I cannot help you, and it is very difficult to know what to say to you."

"But that's not like you, Mrs. Oswald," said Charles, at the same time taking a chair and

placing himself opposite her. "You are always so full of wisdom and counsel that I have got to look on you as having a panacea for all the woes of humanity. Just tell me what I ought to do."

"That depends in a very large measure on what you feel yourself capable of doing. If you can take poor Adelaide as you find her, and mould her into a sensible, well-conducted woman, with good domestic habits, a well-regulated temper and gentle manners, then I should say you are bound to marry her. And when you have worked that great miracle, or rather that cluster of miracles, I have no doubt you, and poor little George too, will be very happy with her. You certainly will possess a very handsome and a very original woman as your wife."

"And if I cannot do that?"

"Then, Mr. Falkener, as the law of God stands, you must have nothing to do with Adelaide. And as the evil practice of men goes, she should never be more to you than

what she believes your first wife was."

"Gracious Heavens! what do you mean?"

"Are you not aware that Adelaide believes Annie was your mistress, and that little Georgie is not legitimate?"

"Impossible, Mrs. Oswald, impossible!"

"She does though. She referred to it months ago, in the very first interview I ever had with her in this house. And yesterday—for I must tell you I saw her yesterday, and went through a most violent and painful scene—she repeated it."

Charles hid his face, and groaned with the agony of that sharp, deep thrust. He felt the old love for Adelaide welling forth from his soul, as the blood does from a real and mortal wound. He kept muttering, "This is my punishment—this is my punishment!"

Mrs. Oswald did not venture on asking for an explanation, and waited till he could recover himself. At length he seemed master of himself and said,

"*You* have never believed that wicked lie, Mrs. Oswald?"

"Never. I knew you were incapable of such deception. No one seemed to know who Mrs. Falkener was; but you presented her to us as your wife, and as a gentleman and a man of honour you were entitled to all belief. If Adelaide had known as much as I do of the ways of the world, she probably would not have run off with such an absurd notion."

"Oh! Mrs. Oswald, I have much to reproach myself with. Annie and I were very ill-matched—it was a boyish freak my marrying her. But she came of a very respectable Scotch family; and though from our utter incompatibility I neglected her, and unfortunately became attached to Adelaide during her lifetime, yet I have not to reproach myself with ever having deceived her in any way. She was my wife before God and man, and if I had taken more pains about her I daresay we might have got on better. But I own I lost my heart, and my head too,

when I met that beautiful girl, who has wrought me so much anxiety and unhappiness."

"Mr. Falkener, you made one great mistake in life, don't make a second. You were a boy then, you are a man now."

"I have made many mistakes in life, but I have never yet been guilty of a dishonourable action. I have won Adelaide's affections, and I am pledged to her. I cannot break my word. I love her still, poor dear! and I shall marry her!"

"You forget you have a prior claim upon you, which throws into the shade even the duty of keeping your promise to Adelaide Snowden."

"I don't understand you."

"You have a supreme duty to your child by your first wife; and if you have to reproach yourself respecting your conduct to her, you are doubly bound to make up for it as regards him."

"But you don't mean to insinuate that Ade-

laide would be unkind to the boy? Oh! Mrs. Oswald, that is impossible!"

Mrs. Oswald looked very grave; she rose from her chair, came near him where he sat, and, bending a little forward, she said in a low voice,

"Do you remember what Adelaide said in this very room, sitting in that very chair, of being capable of committing murder for love? If Adelaide had a son of her own, I tremble to think of what might befall little George. She is very ambitious, and would be intensely so about her child. Bear in mind that she is persuaded George is base-born. Nothing you could say or show would convince her of the contrary. Her uneducated mind would cling to her first belief, despite of all proofs to the contrary. *Your son and heir would not be safe in her hands.*"

Was Falkener very weak for at that moment fully believing what that gently emphatic and always sympathetic woman now said to him so solemnly? Could he avoid the

influence of her tone of conviction, and her apparent far-seeing wisdom? Whatever another and a stronger man might have done in his place, it is certain that a terrible and awful certainty seemed driven into his mind by Georgiana Oswald's words and manner. He was dreadfully shocked; but he believed it true. And with that belief Adelaide's last hold upon him was shaken for ever. Not that he was at that moment conscious of how entirely he was shaking himself free from the ties of the past. We are as little conscious of the full extent of a heart-wound received in a moral conflict as we are of a material wound in the heat of battle. It is hours afterwards, when we are borne to the dreary solitude of the hospital in all the isolation of suffering, that gradually we find out how deep was the thrust, how near it came upon our vitals—nay, perhaps has touched them, and must inevitably lead us to the dust of death. But while long feverish nights of sleeplessness and days of wild unrest must

precede the end in one case, and lay the worn-out body in its grave, in the other case the wound goes on through the natural term of life. From time to time it re-opens, and bleeds or festers afresh, but it does not kill. We live on and suffer.

Mrs. Oswald was far too well aware what a terrible stab she had given to pretend to offer any consolation at that moment. Neither was she so deficient in tact as to appear conscious of how completely Falkener was wounded unto death. Had she seemed to take it for granted that the facts she had set before him had annulled his engagement with Adelaide, she would have provoked a re-action in his mind. He would have sifted the probabilities of her proposition, and perhaps have come to the conclusion it was exaggerated. As it was he sank down beneath that home-thrust; a vague feeling of terror grew up in his heart about Adelaide, and an intense paternal yearning towards the helpless little fellow to whom he was becoming every day more tenderly at-

tached. He had often been hurt at Adelaide's indifference to his child; but of course he had never attributed it to the dreadful reason Mrs. Oswald had now assigned, and a feeling of indignant protest and angry scorn grew in his mind as he reflected how unjust and how ungenerous was the supposition.

Charles lingered on at Mrs. Oswald's for some hours, like a man who knows not how to go nor how to stay. He was afraid to go home and face his injured child and his own solitude; and yet he was half ashamed of himself for dawdling on at Mrs. Oswald's, taking up her time, and making himself, as he expressed it, such a bore. She would not hear of his going; he should remain there as long as he liked; it should not prevent her going about her usual avocations. And suiting the action to the word, she left the room to give her household orders, and in time returned with her easel and colour-box, and set to work to finish a drawing from a sketch she had made of the view and the beautiful group of pimento-

trees from Falkener's house. She worked an hour or two at that, Falkener meanwhile occasionally talking, and more often sitting silent, or strolling through the open window into the garden and back again. Then she slipped away to the music-room, leaving the doors all open; and soon the deep pathetic notes of "Moses' Prayer" came wafted to him from the distance, and lured him nearer. The cigarette was lighted—the music went on. She played one air after another. He was wrapt and soothed by the peculiar pleading of the last, as her fingers seemed to inspire a very soul into the instrument and then make it speak.

"What is that air?" he asked.

"I knew you would like it. It is called 'Ecoutez moi.'"

Their eyes met. She looked at him with a serene and ineffable compassion. His filled with tears; and unable to bear the deep, penetrating pathos of her gaze, the strong man hid his face in his hands and burst into tears. She sat still and silent. What could she say

more than, without other speech than her music and her eyes, she had said? In a second Charles had darted from the room and the house.. She did not attempt to stop him. The work was accomplished.

Meanwhile another scene of suffering, mental and physical both, was going on at the Cedars. Adelaide had completely collapsed on her return home, and seemed entirely bereft of strength. The next morning fever had set in, and the doctor's orders had been that she was to be kept perfectly quiet, to see no one, and read no letters. He had urged Mr. Snowden's being sent for, but Nursie was desirous of postponing what could do no good, and might do harm, as long as possible. She wrote to him constantly, but avoided saying anything that might hasten his return. Mrs. Oswald called daily, and twice a day. It was the only way in which she could satisfy Falkener, and also it was a sort of balm to her own conscience. Falkener was restless and miserable. His feelings were, it is true, entirely altered towards

Adelaide, and the charm of Mrs. Oswald's presence grew on him daily; but, nevertheless, there was something dreadful in the thought of that beautiful girl who had loved him, nay, who did still love him so passionately, lying there ill in mind and suffering in body, and alone!

The only person who was admitted to her presence was good motherly Mrs. Johnstone, and she was almost about the best companion Adelaide could have. She was very zealous and energetic over the draughts and mixtures and the cool applications to her head. The first light pudding, and that great event the wing of a chicken, were like state secrets of illimitable interest in Mrs. Johnstone's mind. She had a soothing, matronly way of talking to the poor invalid, on the rare occasions in which she spoke of anything beyond the grave question of more or less beef-tea; and as she never entered into any topics below the surface of events, or treated her patients as if there could possibly be a deep-seated moral

cause for their malady, she was at once safe and convenient.

Adelaide's illness not only prevented the necessity of Falkener's having an open explanation with her, but even rendered it impossible. And so day by day his life got more and more welded with Georgiana Oswald's; they met constantly, and conversed on every subject. Falkener was rather inclined than otherwise to go over his own feelings, past and present, about Adelaide. It seemed to be a relief to him to dissect and describe them; and somehow or other in the process it was the remaining grains of wheat that blew away and the chaff alone that remained, so that he at once diminished his burden and justified himself in doing so.

Adelaide's recovery was slow; and when she was able to resume some of her usual occupations, she appeared quite an altered person. She had become very taciturn and singularly reserved. She never gave way to outbursts of temper, as was so often the case formerly;

but the dark, self-concentrated look she wore when anything occurred to displease her would have seemed less satisfactory to a close observer than her childish pettishness of former times. When well enough to see Mrs. Oswald, she received her with great civility and marked coldness. They still called each other by their Christian names. Mrs. Oswald spoke of Falkener, and Adelaide answered with perfect self-possession. Falkener wrote to her more than once. His letters began "My dear Adelaide." He wrote of wishing to see her, and being ready to meet her when and where she pleased, so soon as she felt well enough to make the attempt. He would not, he said, call upon her in her father's house, because of their quarrel, or rather of Mr. Snowden's conduct, for he would not call it a quarrel, when really there had been nothing any sensible man could quarrel about. And, unfortunately, he added, Mrs. Oswald thought herself in duty bound not to facilitate their meeting at Wren's Nest. He thought this a

pity, and had combated the idea himself; but she was firm on that point, and he could not ask her to do anything against her conscience.

One day Adelaide was walking up and down the verandah with greater steadiness in her steps than usual. Jack, who constantly haunted her presence, was there also, employed in trimming and tying up the creepers.

"I shall soon be able to walk down to Wren's Nest, Jack," said she, as she passed him in her brief promenade to and fro.

"What should Missy want to go there for?"

"I want to see something, Jack, with my own eyes, before I make up my mind."

"There is nothing good for Missy to see at Wren's Nest."

"Are you sure of that, Jack? Can I quite believe you? Can I believe myself? May I not, after all, have imagined half of it?"

"Then Missy had better go and look."

"Jack, can I trust you entirely?"

"Missy trust me or not, just as she pleases; Jack is always the same."

"I did not mean to offend you. I *do* trust you, not because you are the same, for not so very long ago you were my enemy, but because you have been very kind about taking messages and letters for some time past, and because, except you and Nursie, I have no one else to trust."

"Ah! Missy had better not compare Nursie and Jack, for Jack's always the same."

"Well, have it as you like, Jack; but help me to know with my own eyes whether it is true that Mrs. Oswald and the man whom you know, Jack, I have loved so dearly, are greater friends than, if I am to become his wife, he ought to be."

"Ah, well! it's a great pity Missy's a Christian—that's all I've got to say about it."

"What has my being a Christian to do with the matter?"

"Because Christians have only got one great God, a long way off."

"Do explain yourself more clearly, Jack."

He came close up to her, and spoke in a low, excited voice, with great rapidity, as though the words burnt his throat, and he wanted to get them said as soon as possible. Jack was supposed to be a Christian, probably because he attended the church or prayer-meetings. But it was more than doubtful whether he believed any part of the Christian faith—or was, in fact, anything different from the old Maroons, with their spells and fetishes, from whom he was descended, and amongst whom he still claimed kindred. In hurried tones he began his discourse.

"Missy not tell, Jack explain all. Far up in the blue mountains, in a thick forest of palmetto and mahogany-trees twice as big as any here, Jack has an old Obeah man, who is his uncle. Obeah man very clever, have wonderful fetish. *That's* the great medicine that Jack, or Missy, or my Obeah man can.

use every day, and not some big God up in the heavens, like the Christians. Jack will go a long journey—Massa away—Missy send Jack—say gone to Kingston—go to mountains and Obeah—fetch great medicine; one little drop spoil all Mrs. Oswald's pretty face—hair fall off—pretty colours go. Mr. Falkener not love her any more—come back to love beautiful Missy. Jack bring fetish, make Mr. Falkener love Missy, and punish wicked, bad Mrs. Oswald."

"Are you sure, Jack?"

"Quite—quite sure. Christians don't know—wise old Obeah know hidden secrets—very, very true."

"But I thought, Jack, you were a Christian," said Adelaide, becoming interested in Jack's strange proposition.

"Jack a Christian sometimes, like Massa, like Missy. Massa drunk, Massa no Christian; Missy hate Mrs. Oswald, Missy no Christian. Jack the same. Very convenient."

"No, Jack, I am always a Christian, but not always a good one."

"Same thing."

"No, it's not the same thing. I always wish to be a good Christian; but sometimes it is not easy," she added, with a heavy sigh.

"Fetish always easy," responded Jack, with laconic wisdom.

"Still, Jack, I am afraid."

"Ha! ha! white woman not brave. Jack's feet fetch it, Jack's hands take it; Missy not touch wonderful medicine—only say, go, Jack."

Adelaide made no reply, but walked musing into the house. Soon after she retired to rest, but no sleep would visit her eyes for hours. She was thinking of the religion of Obi, and the secrets known only to the Obeah. In vain she endeavoured to chase the haunting vision and to collect her thoughts upon more rational subjects; back came the doubt, the question, what if there should be some

truth in the heathen practices, and the mysterious belief in unseen agents on which they are founded? When she did sleep it was to dream she was wandering through dark tangled forests of pimento, palmetto, and tamarind trees; that black men, with white beards, ghastly to behold, peeped round at her from behind the low-hanging boughs, and chattered and gibbered as if offering her something they did not name. She woke several times, but always to dream the same thing as soon as sleep returned.

In the morning she arose unrefreshed, and feverish with impatience to renew her confidences with Long Jack. She was craving to know more, and to try *something*—no matter what—good or bad. If good was closed to her, she would choose evil. Inaction was impossible. Perhaps this fetish was neither good nor bad, but only a hidden power, to be invoked without sin and made use of with impunity.

While Jack was clearing away her breakfast

she renewed her interrogation. His eyes flashed with excitement when he perceived she was interested in the subject; and with the excitement there came again that strange preterhuman look and wild manner which had shocked her the day before. Now she felt less surprised, or at least she noticed it less, because she was bent upon getting to the bottom of the question, and every feeling was absorbed in curiosity.

"Of course," she said, "I cannot love Mrs. Oswald. I do not pretend that I do. I should like her to be well punished for all her insidious arts have made me suffer. But are you sure it will not kill her?"

"No, no, Missy not fear. Jack not like to swing for it. Only spoil her—only revenge, revenge!"

He grew terribly excited, and gnashed his teeth like a wild animal. In her normal state Adelaide would have shrunk from him with disgust, and from his wild scheme with incredulity; but for a long time past she

had been brooding dark, strange thoughts, and the just balance of her mind and conscience alike was destroyed.

Superstition is the natural offspring of such a disordered mental and moral condition. A mind on the verge of despair, a heart nourishing secret revenge, is inclined to believe in occult science, and may be tempted to experiments from which it would shrink with horror if the light of truth and faith had not been nearly extinguished in the darkened soul.

The very darkness of the mystery had a charm for her in the cravings of her heart for something positive. It could do no harm to possess the Obeah's wonderful medicine. It would not oblige her to use it. So, after a brief inward struggle with her better and her more rational self, she said,

"How long will it take you, Jack, to go and return?"

"Three days."

"You promise me you will not hurt Mr.

Falkener, Jack? Only destroy his love for that woman who has bewitched him, and so punish her and give him back to me."

"Ha! ha! Jack always the same."

And he began capering and dancing before her, as if overjoyed at her implied permission—showing his white teeth, and rolling his eyes like a demoniac. Suddenly he became demure again, and creeping up to her knelt down and kissed the hem of her dress as he said, in a hoarse whisper,

"Missy trust Jack, and Missy never tell."

"I do trust you, Jack, and will reward you all in good time. My father will be away another week at least, and it can always be supposed you are gone to Kingston for commissions. It will be a nice holiday for you. I should like to understand more about the Obeah's wonderful medicine. I know you all believe in those things, and I sometimes think there must be some truth in them."

Jack's eyes flashed with scorn as she said

this, but Adelaide did not notice it, and would hardly have understood how her implied incredulity, or half faith, insulted him.

"Missy very, very clever, but not know everything, and Missy condescend to learn from Jack some great secrets for her own good."

"I quite understand, Jack, and I hope it may be for my good. At any rate you shall go and get the secret, and then I can think about it. By the time you come back I shall be strong enough to take a walk. And some evening late you shall take me to Wren's Nest."

Again he kissed the hem of her dress. She thought she heard a low chuckling sound as though he were laughing, but of late her nerves had been so unstrung that she was conscious she received impressions for which there was no obvious cause.

She was naturally brave and stout-hearted, and she was bearing calmly an amount of nervous disorder which would have betrayed

itself much sooner in a weaker woman, and been far less under control. Probably, had she had a woman's usual facility for tears, she would have been spared much suffering, and the end would have been different. Before Jack departed she gave him a sum of money for the journey, and as a reward to the Obeah for imparting his mysterious knowledge.

She had no conscientious misgivings about what she was empowering Jack to do. After all, if nature held secrets which the grand old Maroons of the mountains were acquainted with, and who were a very different class (though originally the same race) from the degenerated half-civilized negroes (in the worst sense of so-called civilization), why might she not profit by their knowledge?

The Maroons were savages, of course, but they had many fine natural qualities. And Adelaide did not at all understand that, professing herself a Christian, she was committing

a great sin, even were it not an egregious folly, by dabbling in the occult science of the old Maroons.

She was weary of the monotonous waiting of her solitary life. Nothing appeared to come to a climax. No action seemed possible, and consequently no conclusion. Even though it should prove there was nothing in it, it would bring about a diversity of thought to try what Jack could accomplish, and to watch the progress of a long looked for and possible revenge; for if there was one feeling in her soul of which she was more certain than another—always excepting her undying love for Falkener—it was the thirst and the desire to see her rival punished.

Jack set off the next morning on his journey before daybreak. Adelaide did not confide the object of it even to Nursie. She had promised Jack absolute secrecy, and with the rigid fidelity of her character she kept the secret—on to the very end. When he was gone she

seemed to fall back again into her moody taciturn state; and from one reason or another his absence was prolonged five days instead of three.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WISH WAS FATHER TO THE THOUGHT.

WHEN the evening of the third day approached and Jack did not make his appearance, Adelaide grew restless and impatient. Inaction was terrible to her, and if anything was to be done, either to bring certainty to herself or revenge upon her enemy, she wanted it done at once. The very energy of her feelings gave her a false strength, and spite of her illness she could not sit still or remain quiet, physically or morally.

Some months previous, and before the commencement of the rainy season, when her present state of ill-health had first begun, Long

Jack had built for her a little house of wood and moss outside the limits of the garden, on a spot which overlooked the wood and the the valley, and which caught a peep over Mr. Falkener's white house and the woods beyond, far into the distance where rose those blue mountains the distant haunts of the Maroons, whither Long Jack had gone on his strange mission.

It was a lovely view, and Adelaide had for the few last days loitered away some hours there, dreaming and plotting, and suffering. She had been there some time when her attention was arrested by the sound of horses' feet close by; and looking up she perceived that Charles Falkener was just emerging from the wood, and taking the path which would lead him to the main road. Here was the long looked-for opportunity.

She waved her handkerchief, and he checked his horse and dismounted at once. The sudden joy of seeing him brought the bright colour back to her cheeks. When she looked at him it seemed impossible to be-

lieve he was not still all her own. The sight of his dear face recalled so many happy hours, so many assurances of mutual affection, that that alone seemed true or possible, and all the rest a horrid nightmare from which she must awaken. Would not those eyes look on her as in the happy past, would not that voice, whose tones set her heart beating, speak the same words of exclusive devotion? Oh, surely, surely, if she could only see him and be with him a little, the past would return and the present vanish. "Ah, foolish flower, to think one year could have a second spring!"

He came forward, holding his horse by the bridle, with his old sunny smile and his hand outstretched. She yearned to lay her head on his bosom, as, alas! she had done so often. But the remembrance of their last meeting restrained her.

"I am so glad to see you," he began. "I did not know you were well enough to come so far. How did you get here? Did you walk?"

"Oh! yes—I am much stronger now; and I have been more than once to take possession of my new summer-house. Is it not nice? Jack built it for me just before I was first taken ill."

"You and Jack seem to be friends now?"

"Yes—we have made it up, and I have quite won him over. He may be very useful to us now, Charles; whereas before he was our greatest danger."

"There is a danger worse than that to overcome, and of which I am far more afraid."

"What do you allude to?"

"Why, to your father's opposition. I must say that with our two fathers so contrary to our wishes (for I know mine will be as opposed as yours, and more so), I do not see how we are ever to get married."

"Does that mean, Charles, that you wish our engagement broken off?"

"Nothing can be further from my wish, Adelaide, as you know very well. I was not speaking of my own feelings, but of facts."

His voice was cold and hard, and he threw Adelaide back on her own knowledge with respect to his wishes, as men always do when they are beginning to change their views.

"But we used, Charles, to resolve to marry without the consent of our parents. We are all in all to each other."

"I know we used; and I must say I think we were very foolish. That sort of thing never answers. Why, just think, Adelaide, what a position we should be in—you would have no home in Jamaica on account of your father's displeasure; and I should be in a worse predicament in England on account of my father's. We should be miserable."

"Oh! Charles, it is quite a new idea to me, and a very impossible one, that we could be otherwise than happy if we were only together."

"Still, you know, Adelaide, there are other considerations in life of too great importance to be entirely put aside."

"I know of none."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in the smile with which he heard this last assertion, and he made no other reply. After a few moments of silence Adelaide asked in a choking voice,

"What course, then, do you propose we should pursue? How are we to overcome these difficulties?"

"If it is ever to happen, I think they must overcome themselves. I don't see what we can do further in the matter."

"But, Charles dear, the year is up at the end of which we were to be married."

"Yes; but that was at the time when we never guessed your father would take up the line he has done."

"Again I must ask you, Charles, if you wish our engagement broken off?"

"I cannot wish that, Adelaide, as I told you before. Even had I not the immense admiration and the very strong feeling I have for you, I could never go from my word.

We are engaged, and we will remain so, until you tell me that you are weary of a struggle without end, which has already injured your health, and which must, I fear, be very painful to us both."

What could she say? The time was past when, confident in her own charm, and in the power she had over him, her imperious passion and her natural pride could rise in a storm of words against this cold, calm, unanswerable reasoning. She felt that her hold over him was gone. It might return—perhaps it would, though it seemed little likely. But for the present her feeling was that she could lie down and die sooner than argue with that impassible man!

He did not break his engagement. Oh! no, he was too honourable for that! But he broke her heart by the very way in which he offered to keep it. She saw the depth of the gulph of unutterable despair that yawned before her too accurately to discuss the matter. The man already tied to the stake for exe-

cution ceases to debate with his judges. She did not reason on the uselessness of discussing with him, but she felt it; and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, while with every tone of his voice a thrill of pain ran through her whole frame. The agony was so great that she could hardly tell how much of it was moral and how much physical—the two were blended in one with a mortal sickness, making life seem hideous.

Should she tell him she felt that her influence was gone, and that she was no longer loved? No. It was better to leave herself the chance of regaining it. Even poor Adelaide had learnt in her extremity the wisdom of the saying, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." She would give him no excuse to quarrel with her. Perhaps that was what he wanted! The risk was too great. Besides, while she would fire up at an open injury, she had too much depth of feeling and natural concentration of character to

meet so quiet, so decorous, so resolved an outrage of all her devoted love otherwise than by the silence of despair.

"You will wait a long time, Charles, before I am ready to give you up."

"Then I will wait, Adelaide."

He rose as he spoke, the same calm, cold self-possession in all his words and movements.

"I am going to meet Williams at the new cotton-plantation, and I shall not be home till the day after to-morrow. You must let me know when you wish to see me again, and can do it in safety."

Adelaide was as pale as death, and trembling from head to foot. He did not seem to see it; he held out his hand to take hers, and, as if wishing to detain him and to prolong the interview, she feigned not to perceive it, and said, with an effort to do so cheerfully and naturally,

"And little George, Charles, how is he?"

"Oh! he's well enough," answered Charles,

abruptly, and as he did so he turned round and sprung on his horse, thereby making the parting embrace she still thought possible more difficult than ever.

"Ah!" said Adelaide to herself, "he thinks I do not care for his child. He little dreams that, losing him, I could worship his dog, and adore the horse that carries him. When he was mine I *could* care for nothing that was not he himself!"

She bit her lips for having spoken the ill-timed inquiry. She did not know all that had been said to him on that subject. Oh! if he would only dismount, and let her once more throw her arms round him, and nestle to his heart. He gave her his hand. She did what she had never done before, though she had often kissed his lips, his forehead, his beautiful eyes; she raised it to her lips for one second, and then dropped it and turned away. Before she could look again she heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs on the hard road, and sinking down on the ground, she covered her

face, and with sobs that tore her bosom with out the relief of a tear, she murmured, "Never again! never again!"

Adelaide's character had [illegible] depth and solidity to be capable of [illegible]. She was naturally very [illegible] there was any sort of [illegible] but she knew death and [illegible] met them face to face, and [illegible] happy faculty [illegible] hoping till the [illegible] in the grave.

It was the [illegible] ing the worst [illegible] conduct in the [illegible] had to meet the [illegible] hope might [illegible] yearning of her [illegible] evoked a sort [illegible] just as people [illegible] though nothing [illegible] had too much [illegible]

that she should ruin her cause by any overt action at that moment. It was true that for the next twenty-four hours she wrote him scores of imaginary letters, and had interview upon interview, in which she shifted all the scenery, and improvised her own part and his too, varying it a hundred times, but always making it less inexorably hopeless than what had actually passed. But underneath the fretting, foaming torrent of these exhausting imaginings lay the stolid feeling that there was *nothing to be done.* Ah! if there had been, Adelaide would have been equal to it, no matter what might be its requirements. The worst of all to bear was the feeling that Charles had acted less generously than herself. Setting aside the code of morality on either side, *he* at least had not been true to love's code, and *she* had been true to that.

In the midst of the deep intricacies and rapid changes of her thoughts she had almost forgotten Long Jack, and the wild scheme she had formed with him. It is true her

jealousy of Mrs. Oswald was more confirmed than ever; but by a strange fascination, which probably only a woman could understand, a feeling had come over her that she would like to see her again, to watch her, and study her, and learn what that power was which she was sure had lured away her lover. If possible, she would see them together. Did he look at Georgiana as he used to look at her? Impossible! Such a look could not be repeated twice out of a man's eyes in one brief year. Even if he cared somewhat too much for Georgiana, it never could be the measure or the kind of love he had given her. What was it, then? Had he another way of loving, of which she knew nothing, and which Georgiana had seen and felt?

The desire to see them together, and to watch them, grew upon her to such an extent, that everything seemed to hang on it. It became of paramount importance—a craving she could not subdue—and she devised a hundred plans for accomplishing her object. Of course

she must herself remain unseen; otherwise all would be changed. Besides, Georgiana still persisted in not allowing her and Falkener to meet at Wren's Nest. But she felt sure Jack would manage something. She would talk it over with him; she had already told him she must see for herself.

Meanwhile, the desire to study Georgiana once more, and a little more closely, took fierce possession of her. She felt drawn to the spot as by the fabled fascination of the rabbit which rushes into the snake's open jaws, and the day after her interview with Falkener at the summer-house she drove down to Wren's Nest.

Mrs. Oswald was greatly startled by Adelaide's arrival. It was the first visit she had paid her for a very long time—the only one since the scene when she had gone to inquire after her health, and had been accused downright by Adelaide of stealing Falkener's affections. She was a woman of rapid thought and admirable presence of mind, and probably few

would have been better up to the occasion. Nevertheless, as Adelaide entered the room, she felt she was not received by the immediate upward look of recognition and joy that used to be her greeting in that house. It was as if Mrs. Oswald were still gathering together her thoughts, and calling them from some distant wanderings, before she spoke her words of welcome. They were, however, very friendly and affectionate when they came. But as the visit wore on, it was evident that the old tone of intimacy was wanting. Adelaide was very abstracted, and Mrs. Oswald perceived it. She attributed it partly to the weakness resulting from her illness; and also she doubted whether Adelaide was aware of Falkener's absence from home, or if a little uncertainty as to the chance of his calling might lead to her absent manner; so she said quietly—

"I suppose you know that Mr. Falkener left home yesterday, and does not return till to-morrow?"

"He told me so himself."

Mrs. Oswald's eyes flashed.

"You have met, then? I am very glad of it. I am sure it must have been much more satisfactory to you both than letters, however frequent, can be."

Adelaide had a sort of malicious feeling that she would not tell her how or where they had met. It was no business of Mrs. Oswald's; Falkener did not belong to *her*. His comings and goings had nothing to do with her. And so Adelaide left her mystified, and was glad of it. She avoided talking of Falkener himself, but she asked a great many side questions about matters more or less relating to him, amongst others about little George. She had never talked so much of the child before, and Mrs. Oswald wondered. She showed by the things she said that the little infant had held a much larger place in her thoughts than any one had imagined. No one knew, save Nursie, that before her illness the idle Adelaide had been closely engaged

in working him a frock, and that in her convalescence she had resumed her labours. Of course she said nothing about it to Mrs. Oswald. She was not inclined to engage her sympathies in the matter.

"Have you been able to try your voice, Adelaide, since your illness?"

"Not yet. I am afraid to do so. I have a presentiment I have lost it, and I dare not put it to the test. What if I should break down?"

"Oh! never mind. Even if at first your voice should be weak, it does not follow you have lost it. I should try singing a little every day. It is sure to come back again."

"I composed a song and set it to music during my illness. I have not written it down. I wonder if I can remember it."

"Oh! do try."

Adelaide moved to the piano, and played dreamily a few chords. Presently the melody came back to her memory, and though her voice trembled a little at first, she soon

steadied it, and sang plaintively the following words:—

"One rift will break the china bowl,
And all the rich wine shed,
One loosened string mar music's soul,
And leave the lyre dead.

The broken bowl shall mended be,
And we will drink once more,
The lyre take another key,
As sweetly as before.

But broken faith can ne'er renew,
Or broken hearts be healed;
Let lips that spoke both false and true
By death's cold kiss be sealed.

Then take me hence the mended bowl,
And hush the lyre's song.
Nor joy nor love can touch the soul,
That knew that cruel wrong."

There was a long silence. The tears stood in Mrs. Oswald's eyes as she approached the piano. Adelaide was looking down on the keys, and modulating a variation on the melody she had just played. Mrs. Oswald kissed her forehead, and said,

"Your voice, Adelaide, is as sweet and as pathetic as ever, and I doubt not will soon

be as strong. Let me hope, dear, the next theme you choose for one of your pretty compositions will be less sad."

Adelaide did not reply, but she coloured deeply; and her eyes fell on a little speck of white ash that lay on the piano, having evidently dropped from a cigar. She got up hastily. Mrs. Oswald saw what she had seen. It was too late to brush away the slight but fatal evidence. And then they talked of other things, in the calm, commonplace way that mortals are accustomed to, with aching hearts and remorseful consciences. Mrs. Oswald entreated Adelaide to write her out a copy of the song. She promised she would, and that she would send it the next day. In her own mind she thought it would give her an opportunity of carrying out the scheme she had so set her heart upon of seeing Georgiana and Falkener together.

Mr. Snowden was still absent. He had never been allowed fully to know how ill Adelaide had been. She was glad he was away.

It left her more free, and it saved her being questioned either about her health or her spirits. These last were so subdued that Nursie was intensely anxious. She would have given all she possessed to have seen her darling in a regular fit of impatience or anger. It would have been a thousand times better than that heart-breaking silent sadness which made her utterly indifferent to all that happened.

At length Long Jack returned early on the fifth day of his absence, and he soon presented himself before his young mistress. Adelaide had almost forgotten the purport of his expedition; she associated it with his wish to see his uncle, the priest, or some wise man of the Obi superstition, believed in by the Maroons, and seldom really eradicated from the faith and customs even of the converted negroes. So much had happened since he had gone, and she had past through so many phases of thought and feeling, that her own transient belief in the effect that Long Jack's

fetish might produce, had faded in her mind. She had not quite given it up. Anything that might bring matters to a climax would be welcome, even an unholy superstition, if needs must. But her eagerness was gone, and her expectation of much, if any, result had died out.

When Jack came to her, there was something in his manner and appearance that seemed to her strange and unusually revolting. She checked the feeling, however, by the reflection that she wanted his aid to take her to Wren's Nest, and contrive that she should see Mrs. Oswald and Falkener together; and she felt it would not do to let her old repugnance master her at that moment. Still the more she looked at him the more horrible he seemed. He talked too without ever allowing her eye to catch his; and somehow, which she could not explain to herself, he looked as if the cleansing and purification of living with civilized people, and, in some sense, Christians, had died out of him, and as if he had been steeped afresh

in the low, lawless savage nature to which by birth he belonged. He seemed to have gone through a sort of anti-baptism, which had made him more of a negro, or a brute, and less of a civilized rational being.

What dreadful orgies had he witnessed and participated in among those dark pimento forests that clung to the mountain's side? In what unholy rites had he assisted, which had so deteriorated even his aspect, low enough in all truth before?

Had Adelaide not been thinking so much of her hoped-for expedition for that or some coming evening, she would have been even more struck by the man's general appearance. As it was, she looked at him and loathed him, but knew she must make use of him, and so put the thought away.

She asked him if he had seen his uncle, and if he had succeeded in his mission. He replied in the affirmative, but with a certain tone of reserve, as if waiting for her to take the lead in the conversation, and intending to communi-

cate his intelligence only in reply to her questioning. He told her, still always in reply to her queries, that he had obtained the wonderful medicine, but that it had been very difficult, and his uncle had made many objections to giving him any. Also that various ceremonies had to be gone through, all of which had delayed his return.

Adelaide listened rather abstractedly, and told him he must show her what he had brought some day, but that for the moment she had a plan which must be carried out immediately, and for which she wanted his assistance. Long Jack's countenance would have been a study for any physiognomist. Evidently his reception by Adelaide was not what he had expected. He looked very sullen at first; then his expression changed to one of stubborn resolve, and for a few seconds Adelaide was hardly able to fix his attention on what she was saying. The fact was he was following his own train of thought, independently of hers, and having apparently

made up his mind to some definite resolution, he relaxed in manner, and was all attention to Adelaide's instructions.

From time to time he expressed himself as though he were under the impression that Adelaide was acting with extreme caution in resisting any impulse to question him more with regard to the success of his mission and its ultimate object. He said something in praise of the snake as being a peculiarly silent creature, and added (which struck Adelaide as a strange confusion of thought) that if she was wise, so was he. She took, however, all as having reference to her scheme for that evening of going down to Wren's Nest, when she should have ascertained that Charles and Georgiana were together.

It never for a moment struck her that there could be any question of trying the miraculous effects of the fetish then and there. She wanted to measure the full extent of the calamity before she decided on the revenge which it called for. She craved

to look at her rival in the presence of her beloved; and she felt that either she should be cured of her jealousy by what she would then detect, or that henceforth it would absorb every other feeling. But for the moment her one idea was to be more certain. So difficult is it for those who love to believe they are no longer loved! One proof after another is heaped upon the crushed and bleeding heart; but it beats still, for many waters will not quench love.

She explained to Jack that it was most important she should ascertain at what hour Mr. Falkener was likely to return home, and what was the time he generally went to Wren's Nest. Jack said he could easily do that by calling at Mr. Falkener's house upon one pretence or another, and getting into conversation with the servants. There never was any difficulty in worming family affairs out of negroes. He accordingly went in the afternoon, and returned with the information that Mr. Falkener would not be home till

rather late, and they supposed he was going straight to Wren's Nest, for he had left orders if there were any letters for him, they were to be sent there, and also a message as to how the child was, who at that hour would be in bed and asleep.

Jack was also to call on Mrs. Oswald, and ask her for a sheet of music paper, as Miss Snowden found she had none of her own, and she wanted to write out the song for her, according to promise. This he had also done, and brought back the information that having been shown into the sitting-room to speak to Mrs. Oswald, he had found a table laid out with refreshments, as though some one was expected.

Adelaide wrote down the words and notes of her song in feverish haste, and then, carefully muffled up in a dark cloak, left the house by the verandah window, after dark, accompanied by Long Jack. The plan was that she should place herself in the shadow, and protected by the outside blind, while

Jack entered the house and requested to be allowed to give the music into Mrs. Oswald's hands. Then he was to join her again as she waited outside, and bring her any information he might have obtained as to Mr. Falkener's arrival, and finally wait till she was ready, after her sad and mournful watch, to return to her house.

They passed rapidly through the wood, and came round to the window where Adelaide was to take up her post, and which was one of the windows of the room where Jack had seen refreshments prepared. Round the corner of the house, at the opposite angle, was another window, through which Falkener had entered on the night of the lost bracelet. Adelaide was impatient to look into that house which contained all the secret of her destiny; and though it had been arranged that she should not approach close to it until Jack returned to her, her impatience to penetrate the mystery was so great that she could not keep away. Again and again

a feeling of shame and degradation made her on the point of returning home and leaving the secret unsolved. But love and jealousy end in blinding the sense to all other considerations, and so they did in her case. Her first glance showed her that a small cabinet piano had been moved into the room. She saw also the table with fruit and wine prepared for two persons. There were several lights burning, and she could see every object distinctly.

Mrs. Oswald was there, but alone. Presently the door opened, and Jack came in with the roll of music. Adelaide could discern that—no doubt in order to gain time—he had given Mrs. Oswald to understand that it was Adelaide's wish she should try the music, to see that it was correctly written, before he returned. She acquiesced, and moved to the piano. She was dressed entirely in white, and Adelaide watched her lithe and graceful movements. Her heart seemed to stand still as she did so, and she mur-

mured to herself, "Oh, what is the charm he sees in her which I have not?"

Adelaide had written down the mere notes of the air, but Mrs. Oswald, who was a good musician, filled up the chords and added a bass. She had a very sweet soprano voice—nothing to be compared with Adelaide's, but correct and pleasing; and she sang the air with great feeling. Jack meanwhile was waiting respectfully at the door. The music drowned all minor sounds, and even Adelaide's quick ear failed to detect approaching footsteps. Mrs. Oswald had just sung the couplet,

> "Let lips that spoke both false and true,
> By death's cold kiss be sealed,"

when the window on the other side of the room was pushed suddenly open, having been evidently and, probably, purposely left on the latch, and Charles Falkener entered the room.

He came in with haste, looking very much heated, and as if he had been running fast. He had not closed the window behind him

as he entered the room, and that, with his eager manner, enabled Adelaide to gather what had happened from the broken sentences she heard. His horse had cast a shoe a couple of miles off; he knew he was very late, and feared Mrs. Oswald would be anxious, therefore he had run all the way, and was streaming with perspiration. Adelaide caught his words asking about his child, and she heard Mrs. Oswald's reply that the darling was well and had spent the day with her. Adelaide saw the look he gave her in return. Yes, it *was* different from any she had ever seen when she spoke to him of his child, and her heart seemed to die within her. Falkener noticed Jack standing by the door, and she heard him ask after herself. Oh, what a temptation it was to pass round to that open window and stand before him! Then she heard indistinctly that Mrs. Oswald explaimed to him why Jack was there, and she took up the piece of music as she spoke.

Meanwhile Falkener poured some citron-juice into a large tumbler, and looked round for the water. It was placed on a table close to the door, in a large red porous jar, wrapped round with a wet cloth, so as to keep it as cool as possible, and Jack immediately offered his services, and came forward to pour the water into the tumbler of citron-juice. As he advanced to do this Charles stepped behind him, close to the piano, where Mrs. Oswald had taken up the sheet of music Thus Jack had his back to Mrs. Oswald and Mr. Falkener, and his profile was towards the window, where Adelaide stood. A cold shudder ran through her as she saw Jack take a small white packet from his pocket, and deliberately shake its contents into the tumbler. He handed it to Charles, who tossed it off at one draught, at the same time crossing the room just in front of Adelaide, and half-reclining on a sofa a little to the right of her window. What had happened? What had Jack done? What was the double anguish which shivered through her whole being as she

felt some mystery was going on which she did not understand? Jack then quietly prepared another glass for Mrs. Oswald, but into this he seemed to shake very much less of the mysterious contents of his packet; and having seen them both drink the cool beverage, he made his bow and left the room.

Ten minutes more and Jack was by her side. She was still standing with her face close to the window-pane. She saw Mrs. Oswald draw her chair opposite to where Charles reclined. She heard him complain of immense fatigue and heaviness. Mrs. Oswald urged him to rest awhile. She rose, and smoothed the cushions of the sofa. As her hand passed near him he caught it in his and kissed it. She looked down at him with a smile, and then sat opposite to where he lay. A few seconds and Charles seemed to fall asleep. Mrs. Oswald leaned her head on her hand, shading her eyes, and half-concealing her face. Falkener's exquisite, chiseled features settled into profound repose. The marble brow gleamed white and pure amidst

the wavy folds of his rich brown hair. One hand hung over the side of the sofa, very near where Adelaide stood. Had the window only been open she could have bent forward and touched it.

But now Jack began urging her to come away.

"Missy come home. Not good for Missy to see any more. Quite enough, quite enough. To-morrow morning Missy know Jack's always the same. Negro man never change; love always, hate always! Come home, Missy Addy, come home."

She let him take her home. She said very little. She made no resistance to his entreaties, and she walked back to the house as if she were in a trance. Jack could make nothing of her. He was obliged to be content with leaving her in the sitting-room, which they had quitted an hour and a half before. After extracting from her some sort of promise that she would go to her room, Jack slunk to his

hammock, saying to himself, with a low, fiendish chuckle,

"Only white woman fool enough to think black Jack ever change, ever forgive, ever forget! Ha! ha! Jack's always the same!"

Adelaide remained for a good hour or more where Jack had left her. She scarcely moved, and her large haggard eyes seemed looking before her into far-off space, while her hair hung in wild disorder round her pale face. Presently she started up as if seized with a sudden resolve, muttering to herself,

"That open window! I will go and see!"

But a little while before she had seemed hardly able to walk without support—now she moved with rapidity, but not gracefully and collectedly, as in her normal condition. She seemed to do everything with a jerk, as though some spring in the cunning mechanism of her frame were disordered. She forced her way back again through the darkess and through the tangled wood. This time she did not go to the window where she had stood before, but

straight up to that which Falkener had left partially open.

Without hesitation, but quite noiselessly, she stepped in. Some of the candles were burning low down in their sockets, their consumption hastened by the draught from the window. But the room was still brilliantly lighted, for Mrs. Oswald loved light; and so it streamed brightly over the strange, silent scene that met Adelaide's eyes. The fruit lay untouched upon the table; only the two glasses out of which Falkener and Georgiana had drunk were gone. Had Long Jack taken them away with him? Falkener lay just as Adelaide had left him, but Mrs. Oswald's head had sunk back, and her face was partially concealed in the back cushion of the chair. As Adelaide passed her in her passage towards the sofa, she heard her breathing; it was slow and heavy, but regular. No such sound passed through the half-open lips of the other sleeper. No quiver of the nostril betrayed the passage of the breath of

life. The eyes were only half closed, and fixed beneath their lids; a dark circle surrounded them, and a blue faint tinge shadowed the margin of the still red lips.

Adelaide did not scream or even start. She took the hand that lay in his bosom; it was quite cold. She laid her head on his breast; there beat no pulsation there. She murmured and muttered—"Dead, dead! my darling! my darling!" She drew his head on her bosom, she kissed the thick clustering hair, she put her lips on his, and still she muttered—"Dead, dead, my own, and only mine!"

Presently she started. She thought the other sleeper moved; and turning to see, she perceived that, in fact, Georgiana's head had sunk a little lower, and that she sighed deeply in her sleep, as a person may do who will wake shortly. She stood up from where she had been kneeling close to her beloved dead, and shuddered as she looked at Georgiana; she seemed afraid of the sleeping woman, but not

so of the beloved dead. She stooped once more to leave a last kiss upon his brow, and then left the house as she had entered it.

Very early in the morning, before Mr. Snowden's household were astir, the labourers passed through the wood between Wren's Nest and the Cedars, on their way to the plantations.

As they came near the rock from whence Adelaide had witnessed the fatal duel, they heard a low murmuring sound, as of some one bewailing and lamenting. The rock was among the thicket, a little to the left of their path, but the noise guided them to the spot. There sat Adelaide, huddled on the ground, tearing up the grass that grew around, and digging her white delicate fingers into the earth. All she said was "Dead, dead, my own darling!" She tried to shake them off when they wanted to carry her home, but at length they prevailed on her. The servants were soon roused at the Cedars, and Nursie received her darling child from the astonished negroes,

bereft of reason. The string had snapped under that long strain, and the whole of the beautiful fabric had fallen to pieces for ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MONEYED MAN'S CONCEIT.

IT was a brilliant morning in September, that month which so often redeems all that Englishmen delight to say against the climate of their country. The sparkle as of diamonds lay on every leaf and every blade of grass; they looked as if the oil of gladness had been poured over them, making the surface of the earth more smooth and lustrous. Through the open window the warm air came in little gusts like the fluttering of a bird's wing, and laden with the perfume of mignonette and heliotrope.

Eleanor was sitting in her boudoir, as usual writing letters. She was looking very handsome. A fair comely woman, with a clear fear-

less eye, and a skin like milk. She was remarkably well-dressed, with bright bits of rich autumnal colouring lighting up her toilet and her hair. There was a look of energy in her countenance that made you feel she was the master spirit at Moreton Moat. The door opened a little way, and John Falkener, in full shooting attire, put in his head."

"I say, Nell, don't forget our wedding-day will be the 12th of next month."

"Well, John, come in; what then?"

The tall rather burly figure of John Falkener filled up the space of the half-opened door; he came forward a step or two without closing the door behind him. He did not often come into Eleanor's boudoir, particularly when clothed in knickerbockers and velveteen.

"I was thinking," he said, "that we might give the servants a ball, and as it will come just about the time of my usual harvest-home feast, we had better throw the two into one, and do it handsomely."

"I think that is a very good idea. It will be only one trouble instead of two. I will speak to the housekeeper about the ball. You, of course, will tell the bailiff."

"Yes, I will see to that. Bless me, how time goes! To think it's just upon a year, Nelly."

She looked up at him kindly. Before that she had continued her note while answering him.

"Yes, it hardly seems so long, does it? You are going into the stables, John; just send one of the grooms to Hurstfield, will you?"

"Are you asking Barton to dine here?"

"Not for to-night. Did you wish me to do so? I know he could not come. Colonel Malcolm was to arrive to-day, and Henry and Agnes."

"That's capital. We'll have them all here for the ball. But make them come and dine with us before that."

"Very well, I will. I shall, I daresay, see

Edward very soon. I am thinking of driving over there."

Mr. Falkener left the room, taking with him Eleanor's note, in which she told her brother that she was coming to Hurstfield that afternoon, and that she wanted to have a talk with him. If he was not returned home from shooting when she arrived, she would wait for him, always supposing it did not make her too late for dinner at home.

When John Falkener had departed, the housekeeper was summoned and the question of the servants' ball gone into, in all its length and breadth. Before leaving the room, the housekeeper had wound up with these words,

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I hope you wont think of over-tiring yourself just about this time. Mr. Falkener never having had but one child, and that so many years ago, doesn't think of your being more delicate like than you look; begging your pardon, ma'am, I do think you should take a little more care of yourself."

"Oh! thank you, Jameson, I feel quite strong now; much better than I did two months ago. The only thing I can't do is to sit up late. But I am in hopes Mr. Falkener will not be having much company just now."

"No, indeed, ma'am, I am sure I hope not, for you're not fit for it."

At four o'clock in the afternoon, Eleanor was driving a pair of very handsome grey ponies over to her dear old home—the one she still loved the best, though she had grown to be very fond of the Moat, particularly since she had the hope of seeing another young life spring up within its walls, and of hearing the rather sombre halls of the old place ring with baby laughter. And yet it was upon the very subject of this coming joy that she was upon the point of confiding something to her brother, which disturbed her conscience, and made her anxious.

Lord Barton returned from his shooting punc-

tually at five, and fully an hour earlier than he usually left his favourite sport. His affection for his sister had not paled because she was no longer with him, as generally happens in those selfish natures that only love those they see every day, and every day make use of for their own profit and pleasure. He missed her constantly; and whenever they were together, he consulted her as much about his affairs, and talked to her as freely of all that concerned him, as when she had acted as mistress of his house. Eleanor always said, laughingly, she had the advantage of two husbands, with only the trouble of one.

Lord Barton was surprised to find her a little nervous, and speaking with some trepidation when she began to explain to him the object of her visit. He ejaculated to himself, "Good Heavens! I hope there is nothing wrong between her and Falkener!" But with the rapidity of thought he remembered that her present position might be a good reason for

a little weakness of nerves, and that he had all along felt that her marriage had been, on the whole, a wise and successful step.

"Dear Edward," she began, "I wanted to speak to you on a matter which causes me considerable uneasiness. One never knows how such things may turn out, you know, and if I were not to recover from my confinement, I feel I should be miserable in my last hours if I had done nothing to prevent what I consider would be a great injustice."

"What can it be, my dear girl; and how can I help you?"

"The truth is, Edward, I am half afraid I am not right in speaking of it even to you, because it relates to John's intentions respecting his will. I believe he has no secrets from me, and he has confided to me even this one, which, if I cannot prevent it, I am sure I wish he had kept it to himself, because it worries me so dreadfully. In general I can by degrees influence him and work on him to make him do what I think right.

But in this case there is not time. You know I am expecting my confinement in November, and as it is a subject I cannot for ever be bringing before him, I may never get a chance of making him understand how strongly I feel about it, until I might be taken away myself, and then there will be no one to do it."

"And now what is it all about, my dear Eleanor?"

"Just simply this, that John says if I have a living child, he will make it the heir to all this property, and only leave his son Charles a moderate income."

"Good gracious! But he surely won't do that if it's a girl?"

"Yes, he will—he will make an elder son of her, and oblige whoever she marries to take the name."

"And why can't you let him, Eleanor?"

"Oh! Edward, it would be so unjust and so wrong! His son Charles has always been brought up in the belief he is his father's

heir. He has never done anything to forfeit his claims; and he and all the world would think that it was my influence which had induced John to make so an unjust and unrighteous a will."

"Have you told John all you feel about it?"

"I told him plainly; but I never knew John so *entêté* about anything before. It is the first time since our marriage that he has ever spoken crossly to me. He said he had a perfect right to do as he chose; that Charles had lived away from him, and had refused to come home, on one pretence or another, even when he had asked him. He went on to say it was ten to one what he would turn out to be like when he did come home, and that he was not going to leave this fine property to a fellow who had never lived in good society, probably, since he left England as quite a lad; whereas our child would be brought up by us both, and reared on the estate, &c. &c.; and I could not get him to change his mind in the least."

"There is some truth in what he says, Eleanor. At the same time I understand your feeling that it is an injustice, and one which would probably be laid by the world at your door."

"I don't care what the world says, but I cannot bear what my own sense of justice says. You see, Edward," she added, looking up with a faint sly smile, "he has none of the feelings about hereditary right which you and I should have in this question. His sole feeling is that of the moneyed man, who can dispose as he pleases of what he has made for himself. Unfortunately he does not care very much about his son in Jamaica; and since our marriage he lives entirely in the surroundings of the actual moment, hardly seeming to have a recollection of all the long life that preceded the present."

Lord Barton remained lost in thought for a few seconds. Then he said gravely,

"I don't see how I can help you, Eleanor. It's an awkward thing interfering with

a man's making his will. You see I have no right even to know how he is going to make it. I could only learn it, as in fact I have done, from you."

"Then what am I to do, Edward? It makes me so miserable."

"It seems to me, my dear girl, you must just trust to Providence, and leave it to time. In the first place, we will not for a moment entertain the idea that you are not going to get over your troubles quite well and safely. God grant you may have many years before you to influence John, and bring him round to do all you think right. But I quite understand your wishing to have everything square before the birth of your child; and therefore, as this matter worries you so much, I give you my word of honour that, should a calamity happen which I dare not name, I will do all I can to influence your husband, and get him to carry out your wishes. I need not tell you I shall be entirely in favour of his providing handsomely for your child, be

it a girl or a boy. But, unless it turn out that his son Charles has in any way disgraced himself, and has proved himself unfit to be trusted with a fine property like this, I promise you I will do my best that he shall have his rights."

"That is an immense comfort to me, dear Edward. At least, now I have done all I can. The rest I must leave with God."

After a brief pause, Lord Barton resumed—

"I suppose you are aware that Malcolm is coming to-day. Now, I fancy there is no one Falkener makes so free with as he does with Malcolm. I feel sure if he should confide his intentions to him, Malcolm will reason with him just as I should do myself."

"I don't feel sure of anything of the kind, Edward."

"You mean, I suppose, my dear, that it is not John's own agreeable society, nor his pheasants, nor his claret, which make the chief

charm to Malcolm in his long visits to the Moat, and that John has never found out where the secret lies?"

"Of course he never has, and it would not make any difference if he had, for it is mere rubbish, and means nothing."

"The only thing it does mean is that Malcolm would be more likely to approve of a will which seemed made entirely out of compliment to you, than to advise one strictly in accordance with justice."

"Yes, that's what I mean. At the same time, you might perhaps give Colonel Malcolm a hint, now you know my wishes, in case John should open his heart to him."

"Not now, dear Eleanor, and not yet. Indeed, I hope never. Let us leave it alone for the present; and some day you will come and tell me it is all done according to your own upright and generous wishes. By-the-by, why does young Master Charles not come home and look after his own interests?"

"Really, dear Edward, I cannot think what

makes him delay so long. I understood his postponing it just when we first married. I daresay, in point of fact, he was a little put out by his father's marrying again. And he happened to have a good excuse in some new property he was getting into order. But that is just a year ago, and I think he ought to come home. I mean, before baby is born, to write to him myself, and urge his return immediately. Then, happen what may, I shall have done my very utmost to keep father and son together."

She rose as she spoke, and her brother pressed her hand warmly. He put her into her pony-carriage, and though she was "only" a sister, he raised his hat to her as she drove away, and said to himself,

"There goes as true and noble-hearted a woman as ever God fashioned!"

Mr. Falkener had never seemed younger or brighter than he was during that sunny September, and gold and brown October. His covers were unusually full of game, and all

the old set, Colonel Malcolm, Mr. Pibrock, Henry Barton, and Lord Barton himself, diversified their sport by shooting over the Moreton Moat property, as well as popping away vigorously at Hurstfield. John was getting quite accustomed to what he used to call smart company, and Eleanor had toned down many peculiarities of his old life and manners, which had jarred upon her when they first married. She had done him a great deal of good, though nothing like all she meant and hoped to achieve. There were many more, and far larger, charities went forth from the purse, and the larder, and the store-room of Moreton Moat than had ever been known before. Little domestic arrangements which had been the custom of the house, and which struck her as meannesses, had been done away with. There was no wasteful extravagance, but there was a largeness and an overflowing plenty towards others, as well as towards the inmates of the house, which bespoke the liberal nature of the mistress. Falkener was very fond of

having a few great people from time to time, Eleanor's own former friends and acquaintances; and she was delighted they should come, and pleased to show them her new house. She had had some difficulty in persuading John that it was not always necessary to speak of people in all the plenitude of their rank whenever he named them, no matter to whom. His cheerful temper of mind that October had made him anxious to have a very special shooting-party for a week. But Eleanor, whose heart was full of a coming event, had felt she was not up to the Marquises and Countesses who might come down upon her, with all their titles in full, just at that important time; and, with some difficulty, she had induced him to abandon the idea for the present. To prevent his missing the grandees, and also perceiving that she was rather more tied to her sofa, and less able to join him among the turnips with his luncheon in her pony-carriage, she encouraged her brothers coming with their friends as often as they could. And,

on those occasions, Agnes would generally come over and spend the day with her.

The servants' ball went off as such things generally do—very much to the delight of the servants, who kept it up till six in the morning; and rather to the discomfort of the masters, who saw nothing but pale housemaids and dreamy-looking footmen all the next day. Farmer Jones and his wife had been emptied into a ditch on their way home, whether by the horse's fault or the driver's no one thought proper to decide; and one of Mr. Falkener's grooms was laid up with such a headache in consequence of having drunk too copiously to the health of a pretty laundry-maid, that he was unable to take the horses out to exercise the next, or rather the same morning.

But these were the only casualties, and they were not considered as in any way marring the success of the affair, which was pronounced perfect. Mr. Falkener had danced the first dance, thus opening the

ball, with his wife, that being considered the proper thing to do as it was his wedding-day. People remarked that Mrs. Falkener looked a little pale—though so handsome in her beautiful blue satin and lace. And Mrs. Jameson, the housekeeper, uttered a sigh of relief when she found that her mistress had retired to rest immediately after that first dance.

Agnes had spent the next day with Eleanor, and on leaving her, just in time to dress for dinner at Hurstfield, she had said,

"Eleanor, I don't like your looks this afternoon. If you should be feeling less well towards evening, be sure you send to me. I could drive over immediately without any inconvenience, and I should leave you with greater comfort if you promised me."

"Indeed, dear Agnes, I would do so, but I don't think there is anything much the matter with me. You know it wants a full month to baby's birth."

Agnes hardly seemed re-assured by this, and left the house with an anxious feeling at Eleanor's being so alone.

At midnight the whole house was roused by the unexpected intelligence that Mrs. Falkener was very ill. There was no nurse, and the doctor, who came from a distance, did not arrive for some hours. In the late grey dawn of a wet October morning, Agnes, who had been sent for, came out of Eleanor's room to where Falkener was waiting in an agony of suspense.

"She is safe, we hope, thank God! It is a fine boy, John, but so injured in the birth that the doctor fears nothing can save him."

There was indeed no time to be lost; and the poor little thing only lived to receive the name of Edward, and its mother's first kiss, before it closed its eyes on a world it refused to look at. And thus in one brief hour did John Falkener attain the height of his ambition (that for which he was

about to make—nay, though she knew it not, had made an unjust will), a son by Eleanor, born of the blue blood he so coveted; and then, at one and the same moment, he saw all fade away in the dark shadow of death.

At first his grief was so great that he hardly seemed to realise how he had only just escaped a greater misfortune still—that of losing the mother as well as the child. He had known so little of misfortune in life that he bore it very ill. He was gloomy and taciturn, and greatly bored at being deprived of Eleanor's companionship during the weeks of her slow recovery. She was too weak to see much of him. He burnt that will with a surly angry feeling of having been cheated by fate. Eleanor, on the other hand, though suffering all a mother's anguish at the loss of her first-born, knew that by the death of her son a great injustice had been spared; and if ever the hope of having another

child were granted her, she might by that time have brought her husband round to her views.

The infant of an hour had rather a pompous monument erected to its little memory in the chancel of the parish church. Eleanor was told nothing about it till she was well enough to be taken to see it, when she felt almost as much pain for the wounded affection and disappointed hopes of the poor father as she did for the loss of the little innocent.

About five weeks after this sorrowful event, and when Eleanor was still too weak to make her appearance daily at her husband's breakfast, she came downstairs about a couple of hours after the arrival of the morning letters, and not finding Falkener in the drawing-room, had rung the bell to inquire whether he was already gone out. The servant replied that his master was still in his study, and thither Eleanor went to look for him. His back was towards her as she opened the door—

he was sitting in an easy-chair, and bending forward, as though lost in thought. She came up gently, and laid her hand on his head. As she did so, she felt his whole frame quiver and tremble with a deep sob. In a second she was on her knees before him, trying to take his hands from his face, calling him by endearing names, and conjuring him to tell her what had happened. The strong man could not speak for anguish, but with one hand pointed to a letter that lay on the floor, and again burst into tears. Eleanor caught up the letter. It was from Williams, the agent in Jamaica, and it informed the unhappy father of the leading incidents of the tragedy with which our readers are already acquainted. There had been a post-mortem examination of poor Charles's body, but the medical science of the European doctors failed to detect the poison of the Maroon Obeah. He was said to have died from the effects of drinking very cold water while in a heated state.

The letter contained but few particulars of the circumstances, for many of them would have been difficult to explain, and many of them were never known to the public. All that had transpired was that Falkener having fallen asleep on the sofa in Mrs. Oswald's house, she had been afraid to disturb him, until, becoming alarmed about three o'clock in the morning (the hour, in fact, when she awoke herself out of her incomprehensible trance), she had called in such assistance as she could obtain; but by that time Mr. Charles Falkener must have been dead at least an hour, and probably longer. The letter went on to state the existence of little George, the son of Mr. Charles Falkener by his wife, a Miss Stapleton, who had died the previous year in childbirth.

Mr. Williams here made an apology for informing Mr. Falkener of these facts in this way, but gave as his reason that he had been led to believe Mr. Charles Falkener's marriage had been kept secret from his family

in England. Mr. Williams further went on to state that he considered it his duty to add, though he did so with great pain, that there had been a vague impression in the society of Jamaica that Mr. Charles was not actually married to the lady whom he introduced as his wife. All he could say was that no copy of the marriage certificate could be found amongst Mr. Charles's papers, though there were many letters extant, found in the poor lady's desk, in which he called her his wife. There was a great difficulty in even finding out where they had been married, if married at all, so that the parish registers might be searched. No one seemed to have even an idea of where the marriage ceremony had been performed, or by whom it had been witnessed. There was a young woman in Mr. Charles Falkener's house who had been the poor lady's maid, and was now nurse to the child. She had lived with her mistress before her marriage, but although most vehemently declaring her mistress to

have been Mr. Falkener's lawful wife, she had not been witness to the marriage, and could only state that she and her mistress had together left the boarding-school where Miss Stapleton was continuing her education, and had lived for a short time in a small cottage in a distant part of Jamaica. That her mistress had one day prepared her for the fact that she was going to absent herself for a short time, perhaps two days, but that there was no one to leave in care of the house, and that, as it contained some money and valuables, she was afraid to leave it empty, therefore Mary the servant must remain behind. She told Mary that she was going to be married, and that her husband would return with her. When her mistress came back, Mr. Falkener came too. They seemed very happy together for a time, but her mistress never gave her any particulars about her wedding, or, if she had, the girl had forgotten them.

The girl, therefore, could give no account

of the marriage certificate. But—and this was most important—she had in her possession a packet which had been entrusted to her by her mistress a few hours before she died, with the most solemn injunctions not to hand it over to certain persons. The girl would not state who those persons were; and though he, Mr. Williams, had a suspicion about one person, he considered the subject as foreign to his letter, and would not trouble Mr. Falkener with it. Mary now absolutely refused to give up the packet into any hands but those of Mr. Falkener himself. The papers the packet contained might prove to be of immense importance; on the other hand, it might be only a ruse to foist an illegitimate child on the elder Mr. Falkener.

Mr. Williams offered his services in every possible way, and awaited instructions as to whether the Nurse, Mary Dilloway, for that was her name, should be sent over to England. He would have offered to bring her over himself; but for several months he

feared he should be detained in the country, as it would be neither right nor convenient to leave the property, now so large and in so prosperous a state, with no one to look after it, and that he should therefore stay there till Mr. Falkener sent over some one into whose hands he could transfer the business, or should summon him to bring over all the papers, &c., as soon as he could conveniently wind up affairs, and leave them under the temporary care of his subordinate. Mr. Charles Falkener had left no will, probably because he was, in fact, only his father's agent; and, though everything was in the most perfect order, there was not a scrap of paper indicating any of his wishes; which might be accounted for by the suddenness of the poor gentleman's death. The child, with its nurse, was at present under the kind care of Mrs. Oswald, to whose house they had been immediately removed, and where the dreadful tragedy had taken place.

For many days after the shock of this

terrible news, Eleanor's task was a heavy one. She had to contend with her husband's despair at the ruin of all his worldly ambition in the loss of his son. The little infant whom Eleanor had given him being so early taken, his thoughts had reverted to poor forgotten Charles as the last and only prop of his future prospects. Now that too was gone; and instead there was this unhappy child of an unknown mother, and who probably was not lawfully his grandson after all.

It was some days before Eleanor could induce her husband to move in the matter. A strange sort of apathy seemed to have seized him, alternating with fits of irritability, to which she had never known him subject before. In her difficulty she called in her brother to the rescue, and he succeeded at last in inducing Falkener to do all that was right and necessary. Williams received the due instructions about the property, and was to continue in

charge of it till Mr. Falkener could send some one over to see about it.

In the end it was decided that Eleanor's brother Henry should go to Jamaica, and act in concert with Williams. Mr. Falkener seemed to think he should prefer getting rid of his Jamaica property, if a good sale could be effected, and so accumulate this large increase of wealth in England. Meanwhile Mary Dilloway was to be sent over immediately, with the child, and with all her expenses amply provided for. She was to be given to understand that the reception she and the child would meet with depended entirely upon the contents of the mysterious packet. There had been a slight hope that Mrs. Oswald might be coming to England, and would accompany them, or rather that they would come under her care. But at the last moment she had signified to Mr. Williams that her health was still too much broken by all that had happened in her house to admit of her undertaking so long a voyage; but that whenever she did return to England she would ac-

quaint Mr. and Mrs. Falkener with her arrival, as they might be glad to see a person so deeply and sadly acquainted with the facts attending Mr. Charles Falkener's death.

When all this was settled, Eleanor hoped that her husband would revive a little, and become more like his former self. She had to make great exertions to rouse him, and was compelled to smother all the grief of her own maternal disappointment, in the effort to enliven him. Her success was not equal to her endeavour. He remained moody and absent, though always affectionate to her when directly appealed to. It was as if his mind had retrograded to the past, and he now lived as little in the present as Eleanor had previously accused him, to her brother, of failing to recall the long life that had gone by. His thoughts, or rather his broodings, seemed all memory and recollection, instead of enjoyment and anticipation. Eleanor tried very hard to direct his mind a little more to the great truths of the Christian faith. She tried to awaken his

interest on these subjects. But, alas! John Falkener was of the earth, earthy, and you cannot find the butterfly's wings in the grub.

From the first, however, he so far roused himself from his torpor as to shoulder his gun, and beat about in the turnip-fields. Hunting had begun, and he always spoke of his intention of joining the next meet. But when the time came he feigned to have forgotten the day. Altogether Eleanor was getting anxious, for he ate and drank as usual, but slept a great deal more after dinner.

At length the blow was struck, and the beginning of the end came. He had taken his gun after breakfast, and gone out as usual. About midday one of the beaters came running back to Moreton Moat, saying Mr. Falkener had had a stroke, and had been carried into the "Black Lion," at Sundown. The doctor had been sent for, and the carriage was wanted immediately to bring him home. The tidings were brought first to the stables, then to the

butler, then to Mrs. Jameson, and Mrs. Falkener's maid was summoned to confer with the latter how their mistress should be told. The first thing was to send off a groom to fetch Lord Barton. All this was done before Eleanor was apprised of what had happened. But she was a woman well up to all the emergencies of life. She had immense self-control and self-possession, and she had the quick instincts of duty and of generosity.

She stood on the steps of the entrance as the carriage drove up. They carried Mr. Falkener first into his study. He never spoke. Then they got him into bed in his dressing-room on the ground-floor. Lord Barton and Agnes arrived. Henry had started by the last mail for Jamaica. After a few hours he rallied a little; his eyes seemed first to awake to consciousness as Eleanor bent her face above his, and he smiled on her faintly. Then he made a great effort to make them understand he wanted his note-case. Eleanor knew it was generally in the breast-pocket of his coat;

and there they found it. He could not open it himself, but signed to them to do so, and succeeded in pointing to the first page, where they read, in large distinct characters, "My will is to be found in the upper right-hand drawer of my writing-table. The key is on my watch-chain." It was dated three days previous. He had known then what was coming, and, business-like to the end, had made such preparations as he thought fit. It was his last effort of consciousness, and four and twenty hours later Eleanor found herself a widow.

The last day of the old year was closing in. Eleanor was seated opposite the fire, in weeds, and watching the clock with evident impatience. The carriage had gone to the station to meet Mary and little George Falkener. She had begged to be left alone. But Lord Barton and Mr. Segrave, the family lawyer, were waiting in the next room.

She heard the sound of the carriage wheels,

and the rustling of steps in the hall; then the sweet clear voice of a child. Her heart stood still. The door opened and Mary entered, carrying in her arms the most lovely child of a year and three months old.

"Oh, you darling, !" exclaimed Eleanor. "Will he be frightened if I kiss him ?"

"No, ma'am," said Mary, "he's not the least shy, because he has been taken so much notice of aboard ship."

The little fellow looked at Eleanor and then stretched out his hands towards the bright fire. He let her take him on her lap so long as Mary stood close by.

Eleanor could hardly control her impatience to know all. And so, after a moment's pause, she said,

"And the packet, Mary ?"

"I can't give it to anybody but Mr. Falkener, ma'am."

"Oh ! yes, I forgot, Mary. You had sailed before that sad event. Do you not see I am in widow's mourning, Mary. Mr. Falkener

will never see his grandson in this world."

Poor Mary burst into tears. This then was the end of all her long patience and her faithful obstinacy. The child's last relative was dead, and only a step-mother left.

Eleanor said all she could to console her, assuring her that she now stood in Mr. Falkener's place, and that by his last will and testament he had provided amply, nay, magnificently, for little George, if only his legitimacy could be proved, and that anyhow he would be well provided for. At last she succeeded in dispelling her apprehensions, and again alluded to the packet.

"It's tacked in my stays, ma'am, and has been ever since my dear lady put it into my hands on her death-bed. Every night the stays and all are rolled under my pillow."

At this point little George began to remonstrate at exciting no more attention to himself, and Eleanor had to transfer him to Mary's arms. Whilst she held him with one hand, with the other she unfastened the front of her dress,

and with the aid of a pair of scissors the little packet, done up in oil silk, was taken from the faithful bosom that had carried it so long.

Eleanor trembled as she claspt it, and went straight with it into the next room, to open it in the presence of her brother and the lawyer.

There were poor Annie's marriage lines, as authentic as possible; as also the names and addresses of the witnesses to her marriage, four in number. There was also a letter to her son, "My own and only darling George." It told him her fear that his father might marry again and take his new wife to England, and forget her, and his claims; and that this was why she was so anxious to save her marriage certificate from being lost or destroyed. She then proceeded to give a very simple and touching account of how she came to run away from school and marry Charles. She added to this her own pedigree, stating where her relations in Scotland would be found, and begging George, when old enough, to inquire for them; "for," she added, "they are all excellent and respectable people,

and will be kind to my son." There was not a word of reproach of his father, only he was as little alluded to as possible.

Further inquiries corroborated all Annie's statements, and little George was immediately installed in a nursery becoming his birth and expectations. He was a perfect cherub for beauty, with all his father's exquisite colouring repeated in a lighter shade, and faultless features. To Eleanor he was everything. She could hardly have loved him better had she been his own mother—indeed, he came so soon after the loss of her baby, that she almost felt as if he were her own.

Mr. Falkener had left all his property to her for her lifetime, with a very handsome provision for his grandson, if his legitimacy were proved, on his coming of age; the property to be his on Eleanor's death. If Eleanor chose to marry again, two trustees were appointed for the property, but she was to have the enjoyment of it; and ex-

cept in that case she was to have absolute control of the property, as regarded cutting down timber, &c., during her lifetime; and in either case was to be sole guardian of the legitimate grandson.

If little George were not proved to be born in wedlock, he was still to inherit £1000 a year on his coming of age. He was not, however, to take the name of Falkener (if he did so he forfeited his property), and he was to enter any profession Eleanor might decide on for him.

About two years had elapsed, when Eleanor received a letter from Mrs. Standing, formerly Mrs. Oswald, announcing the arrival of herself and husband in England. By the returning post she got a pressing invitation to Moreton Moat. She arrived the next day, but without Mr. Standing, who, she said, was detained in London by business of importance. Then for the first time Eleanor learnt the leading facts of the tragedy connected

with Charles Falkener's death. There were some details that Mrs. Standing kept to herself, but the reader is acquainted with them all.

Eleanor was deeply interested in poor Adelaide's fate, and asked what had become of her.

"She died a few months before I left Jamaica. Mr. Snowden had sold his property there, and had gone to live at New York. Adelaide had been placed in an asylum in Jamaica, but it was discovered that she was always subject to a paroxysm if she caught sight of a negro, and was therefore very shortly placed under the care of some sisters at New York, at the same time that her father settled there. After that change there was no more violence in her insanity, and at times she used to have what might be called lucid intervals. Only then she seemed to have entirely forgotten all that had happened, and went back to things she had learnt in her earliest childhood, seeming to

have a strong feeling and recollection of what she had been then taught, and which she never before spoke of, or appeared to recollect. The sisters grew quite attached to her. She suffered at times apparently from agonies of remorse, but without ever explaining to those around her what occasioned it. Then she would weep for hours, murmur the names of people dead and gone, and especially the name of Mr. Falkener's wife, Annie. All this was very touching, and led her friends to believe that she might in time recover her intellect; but the doctors never held out any hope of the kind. She gave, however, very little trouble to anybody, and was so gentle, so plaintively sad, and, I am told, up to the last, so beautiful."

"And her father?"

"Ah! well, I am afraid there is not much good to be told of poor Mr. Snowden. It is said he has married Adelaide's nurse—a creole, I believe—and that is a sort of act of reparation. But I have lost sight of him for a long

time. The sister of that poor young Johnstone, who, as I told you, was shot in a duel, married an old Mr. Neville."

"And may I ask when you contracted your present marriage?"

"Only just before I left Jamaica. Oliver and myself were the only two people remaining who equally knew and equally regretted those who had been lost to us by such a terrible tragedy; and somehow or other that threw us together. I was very ill for a long time after poor Charles Falkener's death; and if it had not been for his kindness, and the companionship of dear little George, I don't know what would have become of me. Mrs. Johnstone also was kindness itself. She came to stop with me when you sent for little George, and when I thought my heart would break at losing the child."

"And that dreadful negro you alluded to by the strange name of Long Jack—what became of him?"

"Oh! he's working in irons somewhere. He

became like some one possessed after poor Adelaide went mad. I never can get it out of my head that he put something into the glass of water Mr. Falkener drank, and that it was not only the cold that killed him. Jack took a hatred to one of his fellow-servants, and murdered him. He ought to have been hung for it; but Mr. Snowden did all he could to save him, and I believe it was his interest that got his sentence commuted to ten years penal servitude."

At that moment the conversation was interrupted by little George bursting into the room, the very picture of health and loveliness. Eleanor looked at him with tears in her eyes, and said,

"If only his poor grandfather could see him now, and know that he is his legitimate heir!"

"Yes, indeed, and he is so like his father, dear Mr. Falkener."

"I can trace that from the little I remember of poor Charles."

Mrs. Standing had finished her story, and gathering up the materials of the delicate lace-work that lay in her lap, she glided out of the room. Down in the depths of that smiling sea, that lay so calmly over a thousand wrecks, was there a ripple of some feeling she was afraid to show? There may have been. But who can say?

Eleanor watched her as she passed like a phantom in her white floating dress, so slight, so pale. Her hair had been cut short, on account, she said, of a severe illness. She wore it in close curls all over her small, delicate head, and this added to her youthful appearance. The brow was as smooth as ever; but when in complete repose, there was a deep line at the corners of the mouth, which told its own tale. The silvery, smiling sea, had had its storms, but they were all in the depths below, where lay hidden away for ever the wrecks of other lives.

Eleanor never married again. She managed

the property with admirable discretion, and she taught little George to be less worldly than his grandfather, and stronger in principle than his father. Colonel Malcolm, Mr. Pibrock, and one or two others, tried their chance with the wise, handsome, and wealthy widow. It was labour lost. She had but one answer for all: that her life was consecrated to Mr. Falkener's grandson. And in a good old age she passed away, accompanied by the prayers and blessings of his grandchild and his great-grandchildren.

THE END.

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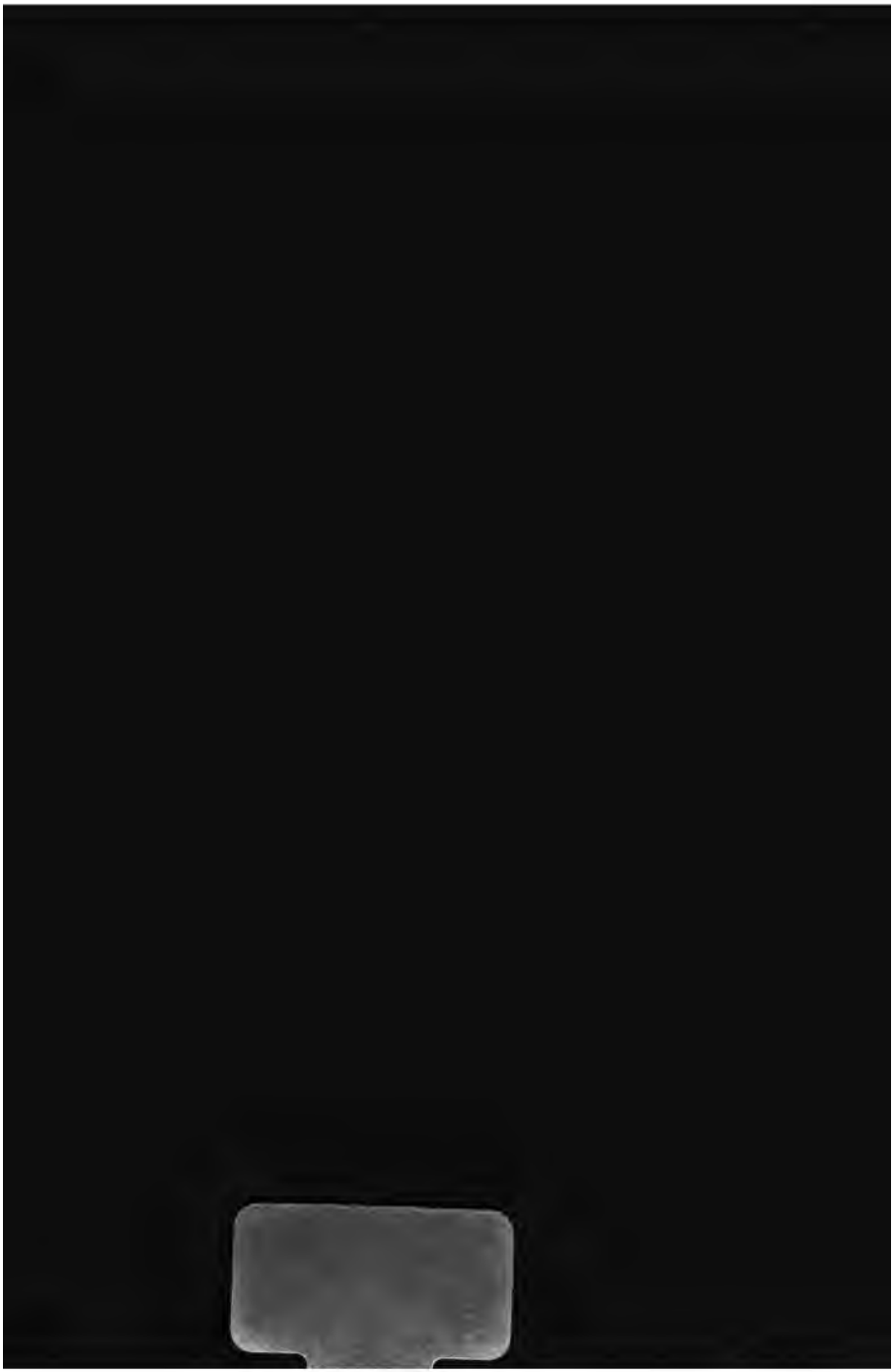
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